

WARNING TO ALL TRIATHLETES REGARDING SUPPLEMENT USE

After a few recent anti-doping violations both caused by supplement use, ITU is again drawing attention to the extreme risk an athlete runs when using supplements.

Two sanctions that were recently imposed by the ITU Anti-Doping Hearing Panel involved Methylhexanamine (MHEA) and Dimethylpentilamine (DMPA), two banned stimulants that are contained in many energy drinks, caplets and bars.

While it is easy to assume that an inadvertent anti-doping rule violation can only happen to someone else, in reality anyone that uses supplements is at risk, even after taking any recommended precautionary steps.

Dietary and nutritional supplements.

Dietary and nutritional supplements are defined as products containing “dietary ingredients” intended to supplement the diet. These include vitamins, minerals, amino acids, botanicals, herbs, and substances such as enzymes, organ tissues and glandulars, metabolites, and other dietary supplements.

But, the reality is two-fold. First, there continues to be significant health risks associated with nutritional supplement use, and second, adverse analytical findings and anti-doping rule violations continue occurring as a result of their use.

Many triathletes question why supplements receive such negative reputations. It is because nutritional supplements may intentionally contain prohibited substances or may be inadvertently contaminated with prohibited substances. In many countries, the manufacturing of dietary supplements is not appropriately regulated by the government. Indeed, there is little government regulation on the supplement industry. In some cases, supplement manufacturers mislabel their products by not accurately specifying the contents or the relative amounts of each ingredient per dose. In other cases, the ingredients on the inside of the bottle may not match those listed on the outside label or package. In many cases, the undeclared substances found in the supplement can include one that is prohibited under anti-doping regulations. It is not uncommon for supplements to be cross-contaminated with banned substances during the manufacturing process if the manufacturer produces other products that contain prohibited substances.

Studies have shown that as many as 20 percent of supplements available to athletes can contain ingredients that are not declared on the label. Not surprisingly, a significant number of positive tests have been attributed to the misuse of supplements. Still, taking a poorly labelled dietary supplement is not an adequate defence in a doping hearing.

And so, after recent anti-doping violations caused by the use of mislabelled and contaminated supplements, many anti-doping organizations are once again drawing attention to the extreme risk an athlete runs when using supplements.

ITU’s position regarding supplement use

ITU believes the use of most supplements poses an unacceptable risk for athletes and their athletic career. While ITU does not recommend the use of supplements, we do acknowledge that many triathletes will choose to use them to support the nutritional demands of training and travelling.

But, be forewarned, ultimately, under the principle of strict liability, athletes are responsible for any prohibited substance that may be found in their sample.

Therefore, any triathlete who uses a supplement and then tests positive for a prohibited substance will likely have to deal with the consequences of an anti-doping rule violation being asserted, regardless of how the prohibited substance got into their body.

Understand the risk

As indicated above, supplements may intentionally contain prohibited substances (which may or may not be clearly indicated on their list of ingredients) or may be inadvertently contaminated with prohibited substances. The key issue is that there is little government regulation on the supplement industry. Some supplement manufacturers mislabel their products by not accurately specifying the contents or the relative amounts of each ingredient per dose. It is not uncommon for supplements to be cross-contaminated with banned substances during the manufacturing process if the manufacturer produces other products that contain prohibited substances.

The reality is that there continue to be significant risks associated with supplement use.

So why even risk it?

Evaluate the risk

All athletes have a personal responsibility to evaluate all the risks associated with supplements before using them.

ITU reminds you all that:

- ✓ Supplements which advertise "muscle building" or "fat burning" capabilities are the most likely to contain a prohibited substances, such as anabolic agents or stimulants;
- ✓ That the terms "herbal" and "natural" do not necessarily mean that the product is safe; and
- ✓ That although pure vitamins and minerals are not prohibited on their own, triathletes are advised to use reputable brands and avoid those combined with other substances.

The risks associated with supplementation are clear – the responsibility for evaluating these risks ultimately rests with you.

Minimize the risk

All triathletes who will choose to use supplements should take these precautions PRIOR to using the supplement in order to minimize their risk.

These precautions may help demonstrate that you were not at fault or not significantly at fault if a violation occurs as a result of supplement use. Although in most circumstances a violation will still be declared, proof that the utmost caution was observed may be taken into consideration when the sanction is imposed.

- ✓ Make a direct enquiry to the manufacturer and get a written guarantee that the product is free of any substances on the WADA Prohibited List.

- ✓ Ask if the manufacturer makes any products that do contain prohibited substances at the plant where the supplement is produced. If prohibited substances are present in a manufacturing plant, the risk of cross-contamination with the supplement is very high – don't use that product.
- ✓ Ask if the manufacturer is prepared to stand behind its product. If they are not you should not use that product.
- ✓ Have proof showing the sensible and obvious precautions you took before taking the supplement to address the various risk factors associated with its use.

Assume the risk

Never forget... finger pointing will not help you.

Seeking advice from your nutritionist or other health professionals regarding dietary supplement use may help reduce but cannot eliminate the risk of inadvertent doping. And even if they recommend the use of a supplement, if the use for that supplement results in an anti-doping rule violation, you cannot point fingers at them.

Athletes are responsible for everything they ingest and cannot blame others, even in the event of an unintentional adverse analytical finding.

Final words

It is well-known that all athletes searching for a competitive edge often look to a supplement or special combination of nutrients to find it. However, research has shown that there are no quick-fix supplements for improving sports performance. Consuming a wide variety of foods and staying well hydrated are the basic cornerstones to reaching athletic potential.

The rules are clear. Ultimately, based on the fundamental principle of strict liability, triathletes are responsible for any prohibited substance that may be found in their urine sample. If triathletes who chose to use vitamin, homeopathic or dietary supplements end up testing positive for a prohibited substance, this can result in a violation being declared regardless of how the prohibited substance got into their body.

Bottom line: Eliminate the risk

The risks associated with supplementation are clear and the responsibility for assuming these risks ultimately rests with the individual triathlete.

Would it not simply be easier and healthier for every triathlete to eat well and to follow a nutritious and balanced diet?