

Protein supplements are misused by athletes

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Protein supplements don't improve performance or recovery time and, according to a recent study, such supplements are inefficient for most athletes. "They are often poorly used or unnecessary by both high-level athletes and amateurs," says Martin Fréchette, a researcher and graduate of the Université de Montréal Department of Nutrition.

Fréchette submitted questionnaires to 42 athletes as part of his master's thesis. Sportsmen were asked about their use of supplements while keeping a journal of their [eating habits](#) for three days. They came from a variety of disciplines including biathlon, cycling, long-distance running, swimming, judo, skating and volleyball.

Nine athletes out of 10 reported food supplements on a regular basis. They consume an average of 3,35 products: energy drinks, multi-vitamins, minerals and powdered protein supplements. Fréchette found their knowledge of food supplements to be weak.

"The role of proteins is particularly misunderstood," he warns. "Only one out of four consumers could associate a valid reason, backed by scientific literature, for taking the product according."

Despite the widespread use of protein supplements, 70 percent of athletes in Fréchette's study didn't feel their performance would suffer if they stopped such consumption. "More than 66 percent of those who believed to have bad eating habits took supplements. For those who claimed to have 'good' or 'very good' eating habits that number climbs to 90 percent."

Fréchette stresses that supplements come with certain risks. "Their purity and preparation aren't as controlled as prescription medication," he says. "Sports supplements often contain other ingredients than those listed on the label. Some athletes consume prohibited drugs without knowing."

Other studies have shown that 12 to 20 percent of products regularly used by athletes contain prohibited substances. Fréchette observed a particular interest by the athletes on the efficiency, legality and safety of those drugs.

"No less than 81 percent of [athletes](#) taking supplements already had sufficient protein from their diet," says Fréchette. "The use of multivitamins and minerals can make up for an insufficient intake of calcium, folate yet not for lack of potassium."

What's more, consumers of supplements had levels of sodium, magnesium, niacin, folate, vitamin A and iron that exceeded the acceptable norms. "This makes them susceptible to health problems such as nausea, vision trouble, fatigue and liver anomalies," says Fréchette.

More information: hdl.handle.net/1866/3052

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