

Athletes using sport supplements are more open to doping

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Athletes using legal performance enhancing and medical sport supplements are more likely to dope than those using sport foods and superfoods, a new study reveals.

While some sport supplements may be necessary for an athlete's program, taking ergogenic and medical sport supplements may inadvertently lead to sports people developing favorable attitudes towards doping

Researchers at the University of Birmingham and Canterbury Christ Church University are calling for bespoke anti-doping education for athletes using such supplements to prevent them turning to banned substances.

In the first study of its kind, the researchers surveyed 573 athletes competing at club, country, national and international level about their use of four types of sport supplements:

- Ergogenic, such as creatine—used to improve performance;
- Medical, such as iron—used to treat clinical issues and nutrient deficiencies;
- Sport foods/drinks, such as protein bars—providing a source of nutrients; and
- Superfoods, such as goji berries—which claim to optimize health and performance.

Publishing their findings in *Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport*, the researchers note that athletes using ergogenic and medical sport supplements to improve performance, through boosting strength and shortening recovery between training sessions can develop the belief that doping is another means to improve performance.

Co-author Christopher Ring, Professor in Psychology at the University of Birmingham, commented: "Our results have important implications for coaches, nutritionists and sport doctors—they must appreciate that athletes who are administered ergogenic and medical sport supplements may develop more favorable attitudes towards doping.

"An [athlete](#) using these supplements may come to believe that using chemically active substances is an acceptable way of enhancing sport performance. This belief could then later develop into a rationalization that doping is just another means to enhance performance."

Two in five athletes surveyed (42%) used ergogenic supplements, whereas one in five used medical sport supplements (18%) and sport foods and drinks (21%). Superfoods were rarely used (2%). Over half (53%) used at least one sport supplement.

Researchers note that future research such explore how use of one supplement type may lead to another and eventually the use of banned substances—for example, superfood use leads to ergogenic and medical [supplement](#) use, which may in turn, lead to [doping](#).

More information: Philip Hurst et al. Athletes using ergogenic and medical sport supplements report more favourable attitudes to doping than non-users, *Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport* (2020). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jsams.2020.09.012](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsams.2020.09.012)

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