

Most elite athletes believe doping substances are effective in improving performance

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Most elite athletes consider doping substances "are effective" in improving performance, while recognising that they constitute cheating, can endanger health and entail the obvious risk of sanction. At the same time, the reasons why athletes start to take doping substances are to achieve athletic success, improve performance, for financial gain, to improve recovery and to prevent nutritional deficiencies, as well as "because other athletes also use them".

These are some of the conclusions of a study conducted by researchers from the Department of Physical and Sports Education at the University of Granada. Their research has also shown a widespread belief among elite athletes that the fight against doping is inefficient and biased, and that the [sanctions](#) imposed "are not severe enough".

In an article in the journal "*Sports Medicine*", the most important publication in the field of [Sport Sciences](#), researchers Mikel Zabala and Jaime Morente-Sánchez have analysed the attitudes, beliefs and knowledge about doping of elite athletes from all over the world. To this end, they conducted a literature review of 33 studies on the subject published between 2000 and 2011, in order to analyse the current situation and, as a result of this, to act by developing specific, efficient anti-doping strategies.

Fewer controls in team-based sports

The results of the University of Granada study reveal that athletes participating in team-based sports appear to be less susceptible to using doping substances. However, the authors stress that in [team sports](#) anti-doping controls are clearly both quantitatively and qualitatively less exhaustive.

The study indicates that coaches seem to be the principle influence and source of information for athletes when it comes to starting or not starting to take banned substances, while doctors and other specialists are less involved. Athletes are becoming increasingly familiar with anti-doping rules, but there is still a lack of knowledge about the problems entailed in using banned substances and methods, which the researchers believe should be remedied through appropriate educational programmes.

Moreover, they also conclude that a substantial lack of information exists among [elite athletes](#) about dietary supplements and the secondary effects of performance-enhancing substances.

In the light of their results, the University of Granada researchers consider it necessary to plan and conduct information and prevention campaigns to influence athletes' attitudes towards doping and the culture surrounding this banned practice. "We should not just dedicate money almost exclusively to performing anti-doping tests, as we currently do. To improve the situation, it would be enough to designate at least a small part of this budget to educational and prevention programmes that encourage athletes to reject the use of banned substances and methods", Mikel Zabala and Jaime Morente-Sánchez conclude. In this context, one pioneering example in their opinion is the Spanish Cycling Federation's "Preventing to win" project.

More information: Doping in Sport: A Review of Elite Athletes' Attitudes, Beliefs, and Knowledge. Morente-Sánchez J, Zabala M. *Sports Medicine*. 2013 Mar 27.

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