

*Position statement of UK Sport, the British Olympic Association (BOA), the British Paralympic Association (BPA) and the Home Country Sports Councils (HCSC), Version 4, issued in April 2007.*

UK athletes are advised to be cautious and vigilant in their choice to use any supplement. No guarantee can be given that any particular supplement, including vitamins and minerals, ergogenic aids and herbal remedies is free from Prohibited Substances. It is important to be aware that some supplements have been found to contain Prohibited Substances that were not listed on the product label.

An important principle of the World Anti-Doping Code (WADC) is that of strict liability – An athlete is ultimately responsible for any Prohibited Substance found in their system or for the use of any Prohibited Method. Therefore before taking supplements athletes must assess the risk and understand their personal responsibility.

Athletes should be aware that any product that claims to restore, correct or modify the body's physiological functions should be licensed as a medicine, according to current legislation. Licensed medicines can be identified by looking for a product licence number on the label (e.g. PL0242/0028). Supplements will not contain a product license (PL) number as they are not licensed medicines.

There is an array of supplement products available on the market. Athletes have to distinguish between those products that can produce verifiable benefits not available from food alone and those products whose claims are unverified and speculative. They must also distinguish between supplement companies that follow quality assurance procedures to the highest standard and those companies that do not.

Advertising that claims to improve muscle growth and assist weight loss are also cause for concern. The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) Director General reinforced this concern in saying "Many of these advertisements are making ambitious claims about products, but when challenged to produce satisfactory evidence to back up these claims, advertisers are unable to. We are concerned not only that consumers may be losing money, but also that these advertisements can be irresponsible in their approach to weight loss and dieting."

Diet, lifestyle and training should all be optimised before considering supplements and athletes should assess the need for supplements by always consulting an accredited sports dietician and/or registered nutritionist and a sports and exercise medicine doctor before taking supplements.

An athlete's training and competition demands may not allow sufficient time to ingest the foods needed and as a result there may be circumstances that necessitate supplement use. Athletes are responsible for all Prohibited Substances found in their system and therefore minimising the risk is essential and a key responsibility for all athletes.