

## Are Supplements really necessary?

By Stu Yellin, Wnbf Pro Bodybuilder and Nutrition Coach

For many people, the mere mention of getting in shape brings ideas of insanely restrictive dietary practices, hours spent in the gym each day, and of course, the added magic of those oh so confusing potions and powders collectively referred to as "Supplements." Unlike macronutrients (proteins, carbohydrates and fats), and even micronutrients (vitamins and minerals), the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) doesn't offer up recommendations, or even grant any type of approval on items that fall within this very broad and ever expanding category of products. Still, if you were to believe the ad-copy in any mainstream media magazine, infomercials on TV, or even claims made by your favorite celebrity, both your fitness success and quality of your life will be severely lacking should you not take advantage of the latest and greatest products being hocked.

As there are so many different products that fall under the heading of Supplements, some simply an isolated version of a naturally occurring ingredient while others more unique in claims and backgrounds, we should look at a few of the more important benefits as well as downsides to be considered in making an intelligent decision on whether to make such an investment or not.

A very important benefit that actually leads many to seek out supplemental additions to their daily diet in the first place, is that of convenience. Trying to get a specifically prescribed amount of a specific vitamin, or possibly omega 3 fats in your diet might require you to eat a larger amount of certain foods than you would really prefer to. Take for example, trying to eat fatty fish based meals several times a week to just running over to your nearest vitamin store and grabbing a jar of fish oil soft gels. In such cases, the option of being able to simply "pop a pill" can make meeting your goal that much easier, not to mention better smelling for those around you!

Another benefit is the simple cost effective nature of being able to purchase individual, isolated ingredients without having to ingest whatever else comes along for the ride should you go the whole foods route. This was a real advantage when athletes first started using Creatine Monohydrate. Imagine being able to buy something that was widely proven to provide many positive benefits, but not having to eat so much fatty beef or smelly fish to reap its rewards! Additionally, unlike food, isolating such ingredients allows for a much better accuracy in determining amounts and potency of what you are getting for your money.

On the flipside of the discussion, the downsides and negatives, we have the large and looming fact that the FDA does not regulate products that fall under the heading of "supplements." That means that despite what you may research on your own, ignoring what your pal at the gym says about the amazing new product he's taking, and especially putting aside what you've read in those ridiculous 6 page "ad-reports" in your favorite fitness magazines, there is no real governing body ensuring that you're getting what you think you're paying for. Now in the best worst case scenario, that means that you might not get the full dosing of a product that you think you are. In the worst worst case, you end up getting sick, testing positive for banned substances, or possibly even developing life threatening issues.

With such a Wild-West type of unregulated landscape, you can easily understand why the number of small supplement companies seems to grow exponentially from month to month. It really is a pretty simple business model though: Buy some bulk product powders online from overseas, pay a small fee to a third party or even stuff the capsules yourself, ask your cousin's kid who once took a graphic design

class make you a cool logo, and then go on any social media outlet to find an attractive, attention seeking fitness enthusiast more than willing to include your products in their already multiple daily selfies in exchange for being able to say that they're a "sponsored athlete" and you're all ready to go!

Now, I'm NOT saying that all supplements are bad. In fact, my personal opinion is far from such a blanket statement. I am saying that you really need to do your homework. No one at these quick pop-up companies has your well-being in mind when compared to making a profit. Ask yourself these two questions: First, is whatever supplement you're considering truly backed by real scientific evidence? I'm not talking about anecdotes and crazy exaggerated gym stories, but actual data that supports not just spending your money on it, but knowing that it won't pose any possible negative to your health. Second, assess your individual needs for your goals, and if the addition of this new product is worthwhile or just unnecessary.

I often talk about the Hierarchy of Needs for individual athletes and clients. If your most basic dietary requirements aren't being met on a consistent daily basis, all the magic sports supplements in the world won't help you. Be smart, keep a good perspective on what you're trying to accomplish, and above all, be safe. Nobody cares if you look great if you're dead –lol.