

# Sports nutrition a 12-step guide to get you started



**ESSNA** European Specialist Sports Nutrition Alliance

# 1. What is sports nutrition?

Sports nutrition products are designed for athletes, exercisers and sportspeople to improve their health, wellbeing, performance, muscle growth and recovery through exercise. Sports nutrition products support and complement a healthy diet. Sports nutrition products are typically bars, shakes and supplements, but are becoming increasingly versatile, now available in the form of teas, cereals, crisps, spreads and more!

Convenience is a key element of sports nutrition products, as they can be consumed on the go without much preparation or planning. Sports nutrition is strictly regulated under general food law, a body of European legislation that ensures these products are safe to consume. More information on sports nutrition can be found [here](#).

The marketing of sports nutrition is clear in explaining the right conditions for product consumption. It may also encourage people to engage in more sporting and physical activity, and generally lead more active, and healthy lives. Consumers must understand that sports nutrition will only help them if they choose to be active but will not support inactive or passive lifestyles.



## 2. ...and what isn't sports nutrition?

Some people confuse sports nutrition with performance-enhancing drugs. These drugs are in fact illegal. Unfortunately, a small number of such products have found their way into our shops and onto our websites through the black market, often originating from outside the EU.

It's important to understand that "hormonal" (steroid-like) products and strong stimulants have been banned for several years in most European countries because of the health risks they pose. These products therefore have absolutely no place in the European sports nutrition market and cannot be classed as sports nutrition.

### 3. Getting started: Identify your goals & needs

Now that we have established the basics of sports nutrition, you may wish to test your knowledge! Before you start browsing the internet or going to your local health foods shop or supermarket, you should ask yourself how much exercise you're doing and what your physical goals are. Only then will you understand whether supplementing your diet with sports nutrition will benefit you and if so, what type of product best suits your needs.

Always remember: whatever your physical objectives are, any product must always be taken proportionately and sensibly, as part of a varied diet, and not at the expense of other foods and nutrients.



### 4. Get an idea of what's out there

A quick Google search will provide you with hundreds of different sports nutrition products. Once you've decided that you want to use a sports nutrition product, it is important to know the role of different nutrients. There is a huge variety of ingredients on the sports nutrition market, including functional ingredients. As an introduction, we are going to focus on the three main macronutrients, the nutrients we need in larger quantities.

**Carbohydrates** provide energy as their main function. When they are digested, carbohydrates are broken down into glucose to provide readily available energy for the body to use quickly and effectively. Carbohydrates are the most important form of fuel for exercise and sports activities. And can help muscle recovery after very intense workouts.

**Protein** is also important for health and physical activity. The main role of protein in the body is for growth, repair and maintenance of body cells and tissues, such as muscle. Protein is an important part of a healthy, balanced diet, but it is especially helpful after exercise for building new muscle tissues and repairing the damaged ones.

**Fat** is an essential nutrient for the body and a rich source of energy. Consuming too much fat can lead to excess energy intake and weight gain over time. Fats in foods typically contain a mixture of saturated and unsaturated fatty acids but choosing foods which contain higher amounts of unsaturated fat, and less saturated fat, is preferable.

Identify how you're going to consume your different nutrients in moderation in order to maintain a healthy and balanced lifestyle.

## 5. Be aware of your health & nutritional needs



Before choosing a product, consider any special health and/or nutrient needs you have. Do you have diabetes? Do you have any underlying health issues or allergies? Take these into account and consult with your nutritionist or healthcare practitioner if you're not sure.

There are now a variety of sports nutrition products available that consider nutritional and physiological needs. Products can be tailored towards gender or age and there are many vegetarian and vegan options available that may be more suitable for you. You may also want to consider the time of day at which you are consuming sports nutrition, given that different products can be beneficial for an energy boost before exercise and for recovery afterwards.



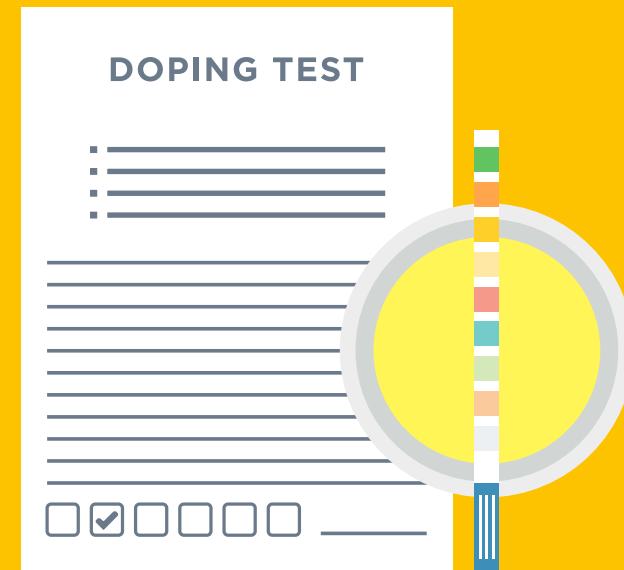
## 6. Compare products & brands

Once you have found the type of sports nutrition product you want, you will still have to navigate through the many different options on the market. To find the perfect product for you, make sure you do some comparing and have a look at a broad scope of different sports nutrition retailers and brands.

Checking the label is usually a good place to start. Does the product contain the ingredients you want? Will you get the desired effects? Avoid products that do not include nutritional information, as this is against the law.

## 7. Consider the brand's reputation

Make sure you only buy from reputable companies. ESSNA members all sign up to its strict Code of Conduct, which require that they abide by all industry regulations. Look for the ESSNA kitemark or check the members page on the ESSNA website if you're unsure.



## 8. Always avoid steroids & banned substances

Steroids, non-naturally occurring hormones and other banned substances are not sports nutrition products and should not be made available to you. However, because of the small black market, both consumers and the industry must remain vigilant.

The industry has taken great steps to minimise the risk of selling a contaminated or adulterated product. Some manufacturers choose to have their products tested for banned substances and certified by third-party laboratories, such as Informed Sport/Informed Choice, NZVT, and Certified for Sport. This level of quality assurance is especially important for athletes who face doping control testing, and are responsible for any food or supplement they ingest but it is important for all consumers, including casual gym goers.

## 9. Know your rights

As a consumer you have the right to access safe products that do not make false promises about the benefits to your health or which contain illegal ingredients. To ensure your safety, the EU has put strict regulations in place governing sports nutrition products.

As previously mentioned, all potentially dangerous ingredients as well as doping substances are banned for use in the EU. Also, any claim that a product has a certain beneficial effect must have been validated by scientists at the independent European Food Safety Authority (EFSA). Any such health claims that haven't been authorised by the EU are unlawful. These rules are important for you to identify the products that are best for you.



# Report



## 10. Report dodgy products

Avoid dodgy-looking websites and products that make exaggerated claims and promise dramatic results, such as 'lose 10 kg in a week'. If a claim sounds too good to be true, it usually is - and the company might be breaking the law. Clear results take time to achieve and if a product says otherwise, it is important to be cautious.

And make sure you report that product to us so that we can get it off the market! You can do so via our [website](#) or [Twitter page](#).

# 11. Read the instructions

Always follow the product's directions for use and take the recommended dosage. If you're unsure how much you should be taking, consult a nutritionist. Often intake requirements will differ from person to person, depending on the dietary habits, health, age, and exercise routine. Remember why you're taking this product and that your own requirements will be different from others'.

# 12. Moderation is key

Remember to consume sports nutrition products safely and be aware of your limits. Your approach to nutrition should include everything you consume in a day - not just what you eat or supplement with around exercise. A balanced and healthy diet, as well as plenty of hydration, are key elements of good health and will have a strong impact on your exercise capability, as well as, mood, sleep, health and energy levels.



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