

Healthy Competition

NSF's Certified for Sport® Program gives consumer athletes confidence in sports nutrition products

Consumers are conflicted about sports nutrition supplements. They hear of products sold as sports supplements that can cause health problems due to undeclared, illegal or banned substances. However, consumers dedicated to their sports know it is difficult to replenish all the nutrients needed for optimal exercise, so they turn to supplements.

Hopefully, they choose one of the many supplement brands manufactured with quality, safer and legal ingredients. Unfortunately, it can be difficult for a consumer to separate, based on the label alone, the good companies from the bad players. Reading the supplement facts panel is important, but it does not always provide a complete picture of a product's contents.

"Sports supplements are the highest profile category in our industry," said Loren Israelsen, president of the United Natural Products Alliance (UNPA). "The stakes are high; the publicity when things go wrong is global; careers and reputations can be wrecked and millions of dollars lost."

Duffy MacKay, N.D., senior vice president, scientific and regulatory affairs, the Council for Responsible Nutrition (CRN), added, "Unfortunately, there are unscrupulous players that have tarnished the reputation of products made for athletes. There will always be consumer demand for products that build muscle and make you faster or skinnier, and this has resulted in criminals trying to abuse the category of dietary supplements to hide illegal ingredients."

Getting a Third-Party Nod

Supplement brands can wave the flag of credibility by getting their products tested and verified by third parties, several of which have programs dedicated to ensure safer sports nutrition supplements. However, only one certification—NSF International's Certified for Sport®—offers GMP (Good Manufacturing Practice) audits, label claim and contaminant testing of the products, and testing for athletic banned substances.

The NSF Certified for Sport® Program helps athletes, coaches, trainers and health and fitness enthusiasts make more educated decisions when choosing nutritional supplements.

"NSF does not simply evaluate test data submitted by manufacturers or analyze just a single sample of a product and give it our OK," said Lisa Thomas, Technical Manager, NSF Certified for Sport® Program, NSF International. "We conduct product testing in our own accredited laboratories to confirm the actual contents of the supplement product match those printed on the label. We also test to make sure no harmful levels of specific contaminants or impurities are present in products that carry our certification."

Israelsen called NSF Certified for Sport® "an excellent program that is trusted by many sport organizations and has proven itself as a robust and reliable certification program."

The proof can be seen in the recognition NSF Certified for Sport® has received from the NFL, NFL Players Association, MLB, MLB Players Association, PGA, LPGA, NHL, CPSDA (Collegiate and Professional Sports Dietitian Association) and CCES (Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sports).

Supplement brands that undergo the NSF Certified for Sport® process can expect:

- Label claim testing to verify what's on the label is in the bottle
- Toxicology review to verify product formulation and label claims
- Contaminant testing to verify no harmful levels of specific contaminants are in the product
- Two GMP audits of the plant annually to ensure the company's products have the identity strength, composition, quality and purity that they are represented to possess
- Ongoing monitoring to verify compliance through periodic auditing and testing
- Screening for nearly 200 athletic banned substances on a lot-by-lot basis, including stimulants, narcotics, steroids, diuretics, beta-2-agonists, masking agents and other substances

Substance Screening

NSF's banned substances testing is completed on a lot-by-lot basis, and the manufacturer may not release product into the market until the final test report is delivered and has declared the product does not contain banned substances.

The NSF Certified for Sport® Program screens for 200+ substances, which comprise numerous pharmacological activity classes. "Anabolic steroids are one such class of substances," Thomas explained. "Testosterone and stanozolol are examples from this class. We also screen for stimulants, such as amphetamine and DMAA; diuretics such as chlorothiazide and bumetanide; beta agonists like albuterol and salmeterol; beta blockers like atenolol and metoprolol; narcotics such as morphine; and cannabinoids like THC."

Testing goes far beyond those 200+ compounds. In addition, NSF tests for lead, mercury, arsenic, cadmium and chromium VI, which Thomas classified as toxic metals that pose health risks. "We also screen for microbial contamination and aflatoxins," Thomas said. "We assay for aristolochic acid if a specific ingredient is known to either contain or be adulterated with it. We screen products that contain ingredients that have been known to be adulterated in the marketplace, for example *Scutellaria lateriflora* and *Teucrium chamaedrys*. We analyze fish oils for PCBs, polychlorinated dioxins and furans, and analyze botanicals for pesticides. Additionally, we check glycerin products for diethylene glycol."

Beyond substances that are banned per the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) or known to be dangerous, such as heavy metals, NSF's Certified for Sport® Program also limits or does not allow other potentially harmful ingredients.

Thomas noted the NSF Certified for Sport® Program prohibits some ingredients that are allowed in competition per WADA's list, but may be harmful. "The substances on the WADA prohibited list would provide an unfair advantage to an athlete using them versus one who is not, thus they are prohibited in support of their mission," Thomas said. "Our program additionally prohibits substances that may have adverse human health effects, in support of our mission to protect global human health."

In addition, NSF does not certify sexual enhancement or weight loss products or ingredients because both product categories are "rife with adulteration," according to Thomas. She said the prescription

sexual health drugs Viagra, Cialis and Levitra, and the weight-loss drugs sibutramine, rimonabant and phenolphthalein (all of which have been removed from the market due to safety concerns) find their way into sexual health and weight loss products. “Additionally, unscrupulous supplement companies surreptitiously add analogues of the substances in order to evade detection,” Thomas said.

Thomas noted NSF routinely monitors the prohibited list published by WADA, as well as the lists of other major sports organizations, to ensure it is adding new substances to its screen through properly validated testing methods in a timely fashion. The process is a two-way partnership. “We also provide information to these organizations when we see a new substance which may be of concern,” Thomas explained.

Marketing Opportunities

Once a brand obtains the certification, a slew of marketing opportunities become available. After NSF assists with the NSF mark label placement, it sends out an electronic mailing notifying its followers that there is a new product listed with NSF Certified for Sport®. NSF also provides all of its customers with the NSF mark to proudly display at trade events, letting their customers and fellow industry members know how important quality is.

In addition, NSF’s Certified for Sport® Program has a smart phone app that allows consumers to search by product, company, nutrient or product category such as fish oils, joint aids, proteins and vitamins. The website www.nsf sport.com and phone app are updated daily for further assurance on purchasing a certified product.

Being on the NSF list of certified sports nutrition supplements is a great place for supplement brands who want to show consumers they offer safer, legal products. It gives consumers that extra confidence necessary in a product category of concern. And when it comes to sports performance, confidence is the most important part of the game. Go to www.nsf sport.com to sign up!