

Q: I'm an endurance athlete. What would you recommend as supplements to optimize my performance?

A: Probiotics are my top choice. Strenuous training can erode immunity and make us more vulnerable to catching colds. Australian researchers showed that a daily dose of "good" bacteria (probiotics) can bring immune systems back up to speed. Just make sure that you purchase probiotics from a reputable manufacturer, and ensure that use-by-dates are adhered to, as probiotics can degrade over time.

About Vitamin C: Remember to take only the recommended amount. Avoid taking large doses of vitamin C. Spanish researchers have found that taking 1 g. of vitamin C supplement per day interfered with the capacity to increase endurance through training, as it prevented the increases in cell mitochondria and oxygen-related enzymes that produce ATP, the cells' major energy source.

Q: Do you recommend taking NSAIDs (e.g. Ibuprofen, as in aspirin, Advil, Motrin, Aleve, Naproxen, and so on) for pain, muscle soreness, or inflammation after workouts?

A: No. The NSAIDs mentioned above slow the healing process by decreasing the collagen content of tissues. A less well-known side effect is further degeneration of the joint cartilage. NSAIDs also act to blunt muscle-protein synthesis and muscle growth. Studies have found that runners who are NSAID users experience greater muscle soreness the day after their races. There are also studies that have found that NSAIDs interfere with muscle cell repair and hypertrophy. Use NSAIDs sparingly, if you have to.

I would, however, recommend proteolytic enzymes and an herbal combination (which can be found in pill-form) after a workout. The herbal combination would consist of Boswellia, turmeric (curcumin), and ginger. All three are known to blunt inflammatory factors without any side effects. Researchers from the University of South Carolina found that curcumin reduced inflammation and promoted recovery following an intense eccentric training.

Proteolytic enzymes such as trypsin, chymotrypsin, and bromelain are known to reduce swelling, pain, and inflammation. However, these must be taken two hours after post-workout meals. Take them in between meals, or they will function as digestive enzymes.

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