FREE GUIDE · RANKED BY EVIDENCE

From Coach Mike Lipsey · Iron Freak Fitness

SUPPLEMENT TIER LIST

Ranked by the research (ISSN, NIH Office of Dietary Supplements, Australian Institute of Sport), not the hype. Supplements come after the basics: eating well and training smart.

TIER 1 STRONG EVIDENCE

Creatine monohydrate

The most effective supplement for high-intensity training and lean mass.

Common use: 3-5 g/day, every day. Loading is optional. Doesn't make you fat, and it's not a steroid. Kidney issues or on meds? Ask your doctor first.

ISSN 2017 position stand · Antonio 2021 · Hultman 1996

Protein powder

Not magic, just a safe, convenient way to get protein.

1.4-2.0 g protein/kg/day in total is enough for most people who exercise. Food first; use a shake to fill the gap.

ISSN 2017 protein position stand

Caffeine

Improves performance at 3-6 mg/kg, usually taken about 60 min before training.

Up to 400-500 mg/day is reasonably safe for most adults. Side effects: insomnia, restlessness, a racing heart. Heart condition, pregnant or on meds? Ask your doctor.

ISSN 2021 caffeine position stand · NIH ODS

Education only. Not medical advice. Talk to your doctor.

TIER 2 MODERATE / SITUATIONAL

Beta-alanine
Best for hard efforts lasting about 1-4 minutes. Tingling is the only reported side effect.
ISSN 2015 position stand · NIH ODS

Sodium bicarbonate
Benefit for short, intense efforts. Stomach upset is common.
ISSN 2018 review · NIH ODS

Beetroot juice / nitrate
May help endurance a little. Results are mixed.
ISSN 2018 review · AIS · NIH ODS

TIER 3 WEAK / SKIP

BCAAs: Limited or mixed evidence. Protein foods already contain them.

Glutamine: No compelling evidence for building muscle.

"Test boosters": Tribulus, D-aspartic acid, fenugreek: little to no evidence.

Fat burners: Minimal effect on weight or body fat. Some are linked to harm.

ISSN 2018 review · NIH ODS

BEFORE YOU BUY ANYTHING

The FDA doesn't approve supplements before they're sold. Look for third-party testing (NSF for Sport, Informed Choice or BSCG). On medication? Ask your doctor first.

DM FREAK

Want a plan built around you?
See current pricing at ironfreakfitness.com

Sources: ISSN position stands (Kreider 2017, Jäger 2017, Guest 2021, Trexler 2015, Kerksick 2018) · NIH ODS fact sheets (2022, 2024) · AIS Sports Supplement Framework.

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