



Official TrueSport Partner

# TRUE TALK

Info,  
Insights,  
& Inspiration

## TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE, TOO TRUE TO BE GOOD.

### Dietary Supplements: 5 Things to Know Now

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We're all surrounded by advertising and marketing messaging - 24/7, 365 days a year. And sometimes that messaging promises things that are just too good to be true.

Many adults take all of that with a large grain of salt. But when the consumer is a young athlete, and when the promise is improved performance through nutritional supplements, it's a different story. That's a potentially dangerous combination - first, because kids may not be able to evaluate the messaging critically; second, because the idea of risk-free performance improvement is so powerfully attractive.

*"At the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency [USADA], we try to emphasize the positive through the TrueSport program," says Amy Eichner, Ph.D, USADA's Special Advisor on Drugs and Supplements. "But we also have an obligation not to shy away from discussing the negatives - issues like nutritional supplements. We owe it to young athletes, parents, and coaches to deliver accurate information to drive good decisions. And as USADA, we have the knowledge and the credentials to do that in a uniquely effective way."*



# Here Are 5 Essential TRUE and FALSE Points To Know – and Share – Right Now.

Points that can empower a frank, fact-based conversation.

## 1. Supplements Are Regulated, Just Like Medicine.

**FALSE.** The FDA ensures all medications are made according to strict rules and that they are safe and effective. But it doesn't test or regulate nutritional supplements the same way. Because of this, supplements may contain ingredients that aren't legal, or aren't listed on the label. Supplements may not be the same from batch to batch, and they may even contain substances that are considered performance-enhancing drugs.



also deliver a massive amount of caffeine. Some energy supplements contain up to 250mg of caffeine. To put that in perspective, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that adolescents over 12 should limit caffeine intake to 85-100mg/day. And children under 12 shouldn't consume caffeine at all!

## 2. Supplements May Lead to Malnutrition.

**TRUE.** When athletes rely on supplements in place of a varied diet, the over-all effect may be that they are subtracting nutrition instead of supplementing it. For example: protein powders are often made of isolated whey protein and are missing other vital ingredients found in real foods, like eggs, dairy products, meat, and legumes. Protein powders are lacking the other nutrients, so you're shortchanging yourself. There have also been studies showing that key nutrients on the supplement label are missing or present in lower quantities than stated.

## 3. Energy Supplements Don't Pose Any Risks.

**FALSE.** Nobody disputes that energy supplements work. That's because they contain stimulants like caffeine. Unfortunately, kids may not have the experience to make informed choices about caffeine use. Secondly, there could be more caffeine than you think. Ingredients like green tea

## 4. Supplements May Promote a "Shortcut Mentality."

**TRUE.** There's no "magic bullet" for athletic performance. But if young athletes rely on supplements instead of real food, hard work, rest, and proper nutrition, they may start to believe otherwise. Being an athlete requires

discipline, commitment, and hard work – the same qualities required for success in life. Looking for the easy way to reach a goal rather than the right way can create negative patterns of behavior, and take you places you really don't want to go.

## 5. Supplements Are Largely Unnecessary for Young Athletes.

**TRUE.** Strength and speed come naturally as young athletes mature. So, it makes sense to focus on other things, like skill acquisition, cognitive development, work ethic, sleep, nutrition, and other good habits. If youngsters rely on the "extra" strength or speed promised by a supplement, they may miss out on those critical factors. They're trading lasting skills and abilities for short-term gains – gains that will eventually even out as their teammates catch up in terms of physical development.

The TrueSport Supplement Guide details the benefits of a food-first nutrition strategy, providing food and supplement comparisons, real-life testimonials by Olympians, and ways to help parents realize and reduce the risks associated with dietary supplements with their young athletes. Visit [learn.truesport.org/publications/](http://learn.truesport.org/publications/) for more information.



This series of TrueTalk features is inspired by the values and principles of TrueSport – an initiative powered by USADA, the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency.

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