

HEALTH

Creatine leaves users happy but researchers divided

Beth Lassaline
Reporter

Creatine, a favoured supplement among athletes, is becoming progressively more popular with average people who want to improve their muscle size and strength.

It is estimated the annual world consumption of Creatine exceeds four million kilograms.

Ryan Swan, a personal trainer and nutritionist, says the supplement out-sells all major competitors in the market.

"Creatine is one of the most popular supplements being used by athletes to date."

Creatine is an amino acid that functions like an energy booster. When incorporated into a workout regime, it allows its users to significantly gain muscle mass in a relatively short amount of time.

Clark Aitken, a former personal trainer and past Creatine user explains how it works.

"Creatine is essentially a compound that is naturally occurring in the body which, when combined with other compounds, produces short term energy."

Swan said Creatine is taken in its most popular form of creatine monohydrate. It is taken orally and is usually accompanied by some insulin stimulating ingredient such as glucose dextrose or Alpha Lipoic Acid, to help increase absorption of Creatine Phosphate into the muscle cell where it can be used as an energy source.

Creatine in its powder or liquid form should be mixed with water or mixed as part of a milkshake. It is recommended to take Creatine before a workout, or

divide the dosage and drink half the suggested dose before hitting the gym and the second half after working out.

"Use is essentially determined by the user," Aitken said. "Companies will generally recommend that you cycle the supplement, something to the song of two weeks on, two weeks off."

For most people, Creatine isn't just an empty promise.

"It's not as effective as muscle magazines, like Health and Fitness and Men's Health would have you believe. But, it is a proven producer of short term anaerobic energy," Aitken said. "If you're the big guy who's looking to get eight reps on his heavy set instead of six or seven, its effective."

Swan said there are factors that contribute to the effectiveness of the supplement like alcohol use, caffeine intake, hydration levels, and general nutrition.

"That will determine what, and how great the effects are on an individual," he said. "Everyone is an individual, it really depends on who is taking the creatine."

Some people respond well to Creatine supplementation, while others don't see significant benefits.

At UPEI, Stanley Chaisson, a personal trainer at the fitness centre said he talks to a lot of people about Creatine and has heard plenty of positive feedback.

"I've talked to many individuals who use it and most have said it has worked for them and was worth the money."

Although there have been many studies conducted regarding the safety of Creatine as a short-term supplement, Chaisson is concerned about the lack of any long-term studies.

"There are no known short term side



Focused, James Nicholson pumps some serious iron

Lassaline photo

effects, two to three weeks, to using Creatine, however not enough long term studies have been done to evaluate the safety of prolonged use. This is unfortunate because studies have shown that many people are using Creatine for longer periods of time."

That being said, limited studies have suggested Creatine may cause some of its users to experience nausea or diarrhea. More commonly experienced side effects are muscle cramps and aches, although researchers have never fully proven Creatine is the cause.

"Because Creatine is cleared via the kidneys, and also cleared through the liver, individuals with kidney or liver problems should definitely check with their doctor before taking any Cre-

atine products," Swan said. "In general, healthy individuals who have been cleared for use by their doctor need not be concerned about any adverse effects of Creatine supplementation."

Before beginning a Creatine regimen, it is crucial to do some research.

"If students really want some low-down, they can do their medical/sports/performance journal research and find a wealth of studies and information," Aitken said. "I wouldn't feel right without adding to read with a critical eye."

Nevertheless, Creatine is still a hotly debated supplement, whether it deserves it or not.

"Just work hard at your sport or whatever you train for and use determination as your fuel," Chaisson said.

Get nutrients from diet before turning to supplements, doctors say

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Reporter

The busy, unpredictable and often stressful lives of students make it difficult to eat regular and balanced meals.

Many students are not following the Canadian Food Guide's daily nutritional recommendations. This means that most of us are severely lacking the essential vitamins and minerals that our bodies need.

Dr. Debbie MacLellan, PhD, RD is a family and nutrition sciences professor at UPEI. She said there are a lot of things young people should be eating.

"Student's diets tend to be low in fruits and vegetable and low in fiber, there's not a lot of whole grain breads and cereals."

She explains that males tend to have diets that are higher in fats. On the

other hand, females are often not eating enough food to sustain them throughout the day.

"Their diets are inadequate, they do not get enough calcium, nor are they getting enough folate." Supplementing your diet is one option to help you achieve the daily-recommended amounts of vitamins and minerals.

Dr. Lana McMurrer, N.D., a former UPEI graduate and local naturopathic doctor, encourages students to consider supplementing their diets.

"Most students will benefit by taking a good quality multivitamin."

Nevertheless, be aware that not all multivitamins are alike, and that your diet could benefit from additional supplementation.

Students should also consider enhancing their diets with a B vitamins as well as a fish oil supplement, Dr. McMurrer

said.

"B vitamins are really important, especially in times of stress." She encourages females who are using the birth control pill (BCP) to consider supplementing with B vitamins.

Studies have shown that the BCP reduces levels of B2, B6 and B12 as well as folic acid, magnesium, zinc and vitamin C.

McMurrer explains there are some essential nutrients our body can't make that we need to get from foods that we just aren't eating enough of.

"Western diets are also quite low in essential fatty acids. They are especially deficient in omega 3 fatty acids," she said. "Omega three helps your body with fat metabolism, cholesterol metabolism, and hormone regulation." And if that's not enough, essential fatty acids will improve your skin, hair, and nails.

In spite of this, Dr. MacLellan said she

encourages people to get the nutrients the body needs through the diet before turning to supplements.

"I always promote diet first, is there a way to get the nutrients into the diet?" she adds, "If you can eat an adequate amount of food in sufficient variety, you should be able to meet your nutritional needs."

Dr. MacLellan and Dr. McMurrer, encourage students to talk to a licensed professional before they begin any supplementation regime, as it's important to have your diet assessed so you can target your own individual needs.

"The doctor can refer you to a registered dietician, if you go through the medical system it's free, but often the waiting time is a bit high," Dr. MacLellan said.

Visit Dr. McMurrer at the Root Cellar, located at 34 Queen Street, or book an appointment by calling 894-3868.