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JERSEY



# COPS

# Always Remember



# Tainted nutritional supplements



BY MATT BRZYCKI

There's no shortage of athletes who have tested positive for banned substances. In recent years, many of the athletes who have been in this predicament blame it on tainted nutritional supplements and, therefore, assert that

the banned substance was taken unknowingly. Nonetheless, the individuals are still held responsible for their actions.

What does any of this have to do with you?

Well, you may take a nutritional supplement, and in New Jersey, sworn officers may be required or selected to be drug tested. Officers are required to take a drug test when there's reasonable suspicion to believe that they're using illegal drugs (referred to as "reasonable suspicion testing"); and depending on the agency, officers may be randomly selected to take a drug test (referred to as "random testing"). The fact of the matter is that some supplements can cause you to fail a drug test and affect your employment as a police officer.

Case in point: According to a prestigious medical journal, a police sergeant who worked "in one of the most dangerous cities in the United States" was fired after a drug test showed the presence of amphetamines. The sergeant had been taking a weight-loss supplement. This particular supplement contained fenproporex, a schedule IV controlled substance that's used as an appetite suppressant. Inside the body, fenproporex is converted into amphetamines, thus the positive drug test.

## WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

Many studies have investigated the quality of nutritional supplements. To give you an idea, let's look at a few recent ones.

**Study 1:** Over a period of about one year, researchers bought 634 supplements from 215 different companies in 13 countries. The products were purchased in stores, from the Internet and over the phone. The researchers found that 94 of the 634 supplements (14.8 percent) contained steroids. Some of the supplements contained enough steroids

to result in a positive drug test.

**Study 2:** Researchers bought 58 supplements from retail outlets and Internet sites. A total of 54 supplements were successfully analyzed of which 13 (25 percent) had low levels of steroids and six (11 percent) had banned stimulants. Of note, 67 percent of the products that were categorized as "testosterone boosters" contained steroids and/or stimulants; 29 percent of the products that were categorized as "weight loss" contained steroids and/or stimulants.

**Study 3:** The researchers examined 64 supplements. They found that eight (12.5 percent) of the supplements contained steroids and/or ephedrine, a schedule V controlled substance.

**Study 4:** Researchers bought 12 brands of supplements from various stores in Los Angeles. Only one of the 12 brands contained 90 to 110 percent of the amount of ingredients that were declared on the label; the others had significantly more or less. One of the brands contained 10 milligrams of testosterone, a schedule III controlled substance.

This is just a sampling of the numerous studies that have discovered tainted nutritional supplements. Even products that are as seemingly innocuous as vitamin and mineral supplements can contain banned substances; one study found stanozolol, an anabolic steroid, in multivitamin tablets. Other supplements have been shown to contain heavy metals (lead and mercury), pesticides and bacteria.

My point is that you may be consuming unknown substances that could pose a risk to your health.

## WHY THE PROBLEM?

It's clear that a high percentage of supplements are tainted. There are two likely reasons why this happens.

First, it could be the result of cross-contamination. This occurs when the same machines are used to process different types of products without proper cleaning of the equipment. In other words, it's due to poor quality control.

Second, manufacturers may deliberately "spike" the supplement with an illegal or banned substance with the hope that it will work better. Obviously, a product that works better can lead to greater sales.




## BUYER BEWARE

According to the New Jersey Attorney General's Law Enforcement Drug Testing Policy, prior to submitting a urine sample, sworn officers are asked to complete a medical questionnaire describing all medications that were taken within the previous 14 days. This includes prescription medications and non-prescription medications such as nutritional supplements.

Understand that filling out the form doesn't automatically entitle you to a free pass; the form is looked at by a medical review officer to determine if any substances that are noted on the form can account for testing positive.

## THE BOTTOM LINE

The Food and Drug Administration doesn't review nutritional supplements before the products are sold. If you choose to take supplements, make sure that the products have been tested for undeclared ingredients and certified by an independent organization such as NSF International. 

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