The Top 10 Cost-Effective Performance Enhancing Supplements

Whether you are the most elite athlete or you are simply the weekend gym warrior, we all want to maximize our efforts while in the gym. Some of us love the grit and wear of pushing our body to the limits, just short of exhaustion, while others go because they have longed to simply be a healthier version of themselves. The latter not necessarily loving the time commitment it truly takes to attain results. Both groups however eager to see results nonetheless.

Sports Performance supplements have been around for decades and within those years, thousands upon thousands of products have hit the shelf boldly claiming results that everyone wants to hear, “lose 20lbs in a week!” “Add 10lbs of muscle!” “Detoxify all those toxins and feel great!”—you get the point. As the consumer, we want to believe there are ways to shortcut the process of hard work and patience so we throw our money at these products, often times losing more weight in our pockets than our stomachs. We want to believe that we can take a certain supplement and get away with lackluster training and nothing more than a half-assed adherence to any form of diet. I get it. With the emergence of the newest generation, technology has molded our understanding to; if we want something then we can have it with seconds, minutes, hours, or even if we’re patient enough, days.

So what works? And if it does work, is it significant enough to make a difference that is worth the expense you may have to pay? I think it’s noteworthy to mention to whom may truly not understand and serve as head-banging reminder to those too stubborn to accept, that supplements are simply what the word implies—they supplement your efforts! Nothing discussed today will do a bit of difference if you are not putting your nutrition first and adequately providing your body with enough stimulus in the gym to produce changes. So take care of your body through a proper diet. We have plenty of excellent articles on how to create a healthy diet as well as plenty of health professionals at your disposal for free on this site, so feel free to reach out to any of us.

Okay, okay, enough of the preface, let’s get to what you guys are here for! Below are some of the case-studied supplements that have shown significant improvements in endurance, power, fat loss, muscle retention and muscle gain. I am of no affiliation with any brands so therefore will not be listing any particular brand, but understand that supplements are not FDA regulated so be mindful of purity in the brand you may choose to purchase.

**Capsulated Gender Specific Multivitamin**

Purpose: To provide a full spectrum of vitamins and minerals when in deficient of diet. Often more beneficial when in a caloric deficit.

Dosing Protocol: Typically taken with a meal once or twice daily

Consideration: Always buy a gender specific multivitamin as a non-gender specific will contain too few ingredients that are recommended for your particular gender. You will also want to get a capsulated and not tablet-based multivitamin to ensure proper absorption. Tablet-based multivitamins are often heat-pressed and present a challenge for the body to properly break it down.

**Creatine Monohydrate**

Purpose: To increase muscular output and intra muscular hydration. The ATP-CP system is 1 of 3 energy systems in the body and is utilized to produce short powerful contractions by resynthesizing ATP, our muscles energy source, through the use of creatine phosphate. This is one of the most studied and affordable supplements on the market.

Dosing Protocol: 3-5g for females and 5-10g for males; dependent on overall size and muscularity

Consideration: Some company’s recommend a ‘loading protocol’ where the consumer ingests up to 20g/daily for a short period of time. This is not needed to optimize results.

**Whey Protein**

Purpose: A fast-absorbing protein source that contains a higher amino acid profile than most other protein sources.

Dosing Protocol: Whey protein can be supplemented in a diet in efforts to reach desired protein intake. Due to the chemical makeup of whey protein, it serves as an excellent source of protein immediately after workouts to immediately protect the muscle from further catabolic damage.

Consideration: Whey protein should be taken in consideration with your dieting goals. Remember, to lose weight you muscle be in a caloric deficit, while to gain muscle you must be in a caloric surplus. Whey protein can be catered to assist in both.

**Casein/Mix Protein**

Purpose: A slow-absorbing protein source that contains a higher amino acid profile than most other protein sources

Dosing Protocol: Casein protein can supplemented in a diet in efforts to reach desired protein intake. Due to the chemical makeup of casein protein, it serves as an excellent source of protein immediately before bed or in long bouts of to immediately protect the muscle from further catabolic damage.

Consideration: Casein will contain a lower leucine content that a whey/casein mix, so dependent on how your recovery is as well as how much of your protein intake comes from whey shakes, consider which option is best for you.

**Branch Chain Amino Acids (BCAAs)**

Purpose: BCAA’s prevent muscle breakdown and can increase muscle bio-synthesis. There are 20 amino acids in the body, but only 3 branch chained. The three BCAAs are leucine, isoleucine, and valine. It is understood that leucine is the most important of the three in regards to muscle bio-synthesis, therefore will usually have a higher concentration in BCAA supplements

Dosing Protocol: BCAA’s can be taken as often as desired, but should be included around your workout. Look for a 2:1 ratio of leucine to isoleucine and valine.

Consideration: BCAA’s can be great to aid in recovery and reduce the prolonging of muscle soreness, but when in a caloric surplus are less of importance to take.

**Beta-Alanine**

Purpose: Beta-Alanine serves as a building block to carnosine which is an acid buffer and helps reduce lactic acid build up, which will help increase muscular endurance during high volume workouts

Dosing Protocol: Standard dosing protocol is anywhere from 2-6g. Paresthesia may occur when taking large doses so it is recommended to divide your daily dosage into 2-3 separate doses. Paresthesia is harmless, but uncomfortable for some as it produces a brief itching/tingling sensation. Beta-Alanine is not time-dependent and can be taken daily.

Consideration: Beta-Alanine, similar to creatine monohydrate, is an extremely affordable supplement that can provide noticeable benefits.

**Essential Fatty Acids**

Purpose: EFA’s commonly in the form of fish oil or flax oil, have an abundance of health benefits including; heart health, muscle soreness, improved brain function, to name a few. Fish oil is comprised predominately of eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA). These Omega 3 fatty acids are excellent in balancing common high Omega 6 diets.

Dosing Protocol: Dosing for EFA’s will be dependent upon desired goal, but it is recommended that 250mg is the minimum for general public, but can be up to 6g to combat muscle soreness.

Consideration: EFA’s are fatty acids which should be taken into consideration when tracking calories and are on a calorie deficit. Supplementation is not the only form of attaining EFA’s as does cooked fish. Aim to achieve your EFA intake through whole foods as well as supplements.

**Vitamin D**

Purpose: Similar to EFA’s, Vitamin D has a whole host of benefits ranging from, improved mood, bone health, testosterone production (at high doses), and to reduced risk of cancer and diabetes. The sun is our major source of natural Vitamin D, but can also be found in fish and eggs. It’s common for people to be below optimal levels in the body for this nutrient.

Dosing Protocol: 1000-2000IU is a low effective dosage, but has a safe upper limit at around 4000IU/day.

Consideration: If supplementing with a broad-spectrum multivitamin, make sure to check the Vitamin D content before adding adjacent Vitamin D. Vitamin D is fat soluble and should be taken with a fat-containing food and/or with EFA’s.

**Caffeine**

Purpose: Caffeine is a powerful stimulant that is used to improve strength and endurance while also providing mental stimulation. Caffeine works by blocks adenosine receptors, which inhibits sedation and relaxation and promotes alertness. Caffeine can be utilized for its fat-burning benefits as well.

Dosing Protocol: Caffeine is tolerance-based, as individuals who consume it on a regular basis will have diminishing results without consuming continued higher amounts. It is recommended to start with 100mg to assess tolerance as 200mg is often the recommend dosage for fat loss benefits and dosing 400mg and higher for strength benefits.

Consideration: Caffeine should be taken with caution as it will increase your heartrate. Always consult with your physician before deciding to proceed with caffeine supplementation to make sure your heart is healthy enough. If you are actively taking caffeine on a routine basis, consider cycling your dosage to allow for adenosine receptors to become more receptive to lower dosages.

**Green Tea Extract (EGCG)**

Purpose:  Green tea extract is considered to impact nearly every organ in the body as it is cardioprotective, neuroprotective, anti-obesity, anti-carcinogenic, anti-diabetic, anti-artherogenic, liver protective and beneficial for blood vessel health. Green tea extract

Dosing Protocol: For fat burning benefits, 400-500mg daily consumption is recommended. This dosing protocol is dependent upon EGCG-equivalent.

Consideration: Green tea extract works synergistically with caffeine in efforts to increase fat loss.

There you have it! A list of 10 supplements that have been proven to be effective to enhance your athletic/cognitive performance, be safe in recommended dosages, and not break the bank! Of course there is room for argument that these might not be everyone’s top 10, and there are sure to be plenty other supplements that will help yield results, but with the assistance of just a few of these, your performance in the gym can be enhanced. Ultimately, it’s most important to understand that there are no “needed” supplements and results can be achieved through consistent hard work and a well-balanced diet. If you are interested in further improving your athletic performance, I suggest considering one of the above mentioned only after consulting with your physician.