

Athletes' creatine use climbs

The supplement is said to increase strength, energy and endurance

By Ben Romano
Higher Education Reporter

Use of the nutrition supplement creatine has increased dramatically in the past three years. Athletes from Olympic weight lifters to the 1998 Super Bowl Champion Denver Broncos to amateurs are using the supplement in record numbers.

U.S. sales of creatine have doubled from \$50 million in 1996 to \$100 million in 1997. This year's sales are expected to reach \$200 million, according to an April 20 Sports Illustrated article.

Chris George, manager of the General Nutrition Center at Valley River Center, attributes the enormous popularity of creatine products to their effectiveness.

"It's one of the best-selling supplements," George said. "I think it works really well."

Creatine is a substance found in red muscle tissue. As well as occurring naturally in the body, creatine is also found in red meat and fish. It is used in the synthesis of adenosine triphosphate, the chief molecule responsible for producing the energy that muscles use to contract.

Researchers have found that an increase in the level of creatine ingested can lead to marked increases in performance and body composition. Higher levels of creatine have been shown to increase available instant energy and muscle strength, improve endurance and delay fatigue.

Many University students, such

Creatine statistics

■ Creatine was first isolated in meat in 1832 by a French chemist.

■ Researchers discover in 1847 that creatine accumulates in muscles as a result of physical activity.

■ Experiments in the early 1900s prove that creatine is stored in the body.

■ Researchers find in 1912 that ingesting creatine causes increased creatine content in muscles.

■ Creatine is determined to be a major part of muscle metabolism in 1927.

■ Researchers are conducting recent experiments on how creatine benefits sports performance.

SOURCE: Muscle Marketing USA Journal

as freshman Jeff Davidson, have used the supplement and experienced the benefits first-hand. Davidson, 20, has been lifting weights for about four years, he said. He has used creatine for the last six months.

"I noticed a big difference," he said. "I got a much bigger pump with creatine. After a workout [with creatine] your muscles feel hard, as if you were flexing."

Davidson guessed that he experienced muscle gains 15 to 20 percent faster in the six months he used creatine compared to another six-month period when he was not using the supplement.

"It wasn't like a steroid, but it is easily the best legal supplement on the market," said Davidson, who has used a variety of other weight-training supplements.

Two weeks ago, Davidson stopped using the supplement "because there is no conclusive evidence about the long-term effects of the supplement," he said. "There's potentially some significant side effects from taking it."

Like Davidson, many creatine users are concerned about some of the long-term side effects, including the increased risk of cancer from using the substance, George said.

"Nothing has been proven on the long-term side effects," he said.

The only side effects he has heard of involved improper use of the supplement. Some people who take too much of it have experienced cramps, George said.

Davidson said some of his friends who have used creatine experienced insomnia during the "loading phase."

The loading phase is a period of high consumption of the substance, where users are encouraged to take two to three times their normal daily amount. This phase is designed to raise the level of creatine to a level that will provide maximum exercise benefits.

After the loading phase, which typically lasts four to five days, the supplement must be taken daily to maintain that level, according to the Experimental and Applied Sciences Web page. EAS is one of many major producers of creatine, and it supplies the Broncos with creatine and other supplements.



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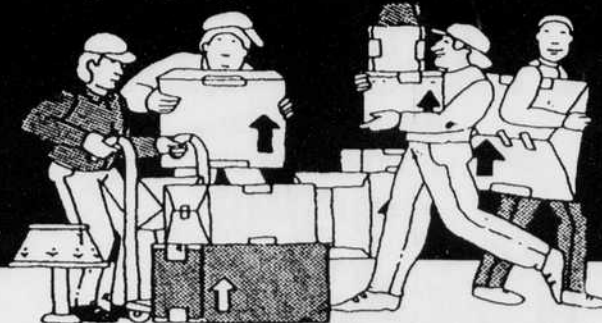
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