

Warning To Athletes Using High Doses Of Prescription Drugs

Speaking at a conference on drug-taking in sport, Professor Declan Naughton, Professor of Bimolecular Sciences at Kingston University in South West London, cautioned sportsmen and women against using drugs known as nitrites without clinical supervision to improve their performance.

Naughton warned that such athletes could suffer a range of side effects from convulsions to coma, and could even kill themselves. Based in the School of Life Sciences, Professor Naughton, who is one of the scientists who first discovered the beneficial effects of nitrite said he was concerned that athletes are unlikely to be aware of the effects of misusing it and added that the future uptake of this drug, based on current research on the levels of abuse of performance enhancing drugs by athletes, by the athletic community is of real concern.

Naughton also remarked that Nitrite has enormous potential as a treatment for diseases characterized by inadequate blood supply but if taken in supplement form without clinical supervision, nitrite may lead to a number of serious side effects including cardiovascular collapse, coma, convulsions, and death.

Nitrite is not on the list of substances banned by the international sporting authorities and athletes face no penalty or disciplinary action for taking it, although athletes are routinely tested for prohibited drugs. He also remarked that it is not easy to enforce a ban for nitrite because small doses are found in foods such as cured meats and lettuce and it is expelled from the body in urine.

Dr Andrea Petroczi, a Reader in Public Health at Kingston University, speaking at the same conference, said that her research on performance enhancing drugs suggested that there was a possibility that nitrites could be taken up by athletes. She reported that some athletes were taking as many as 26 different drugs and supplements in a single day and said studies using declarations made by athletes during doping controls highlight two concerning issues: a marked increase in the use of asthma medications and the use of non steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs well above the appropriate level for reported illnesses or injuries.

In another development, Professor Maughan, who chairs the Sports Nutrition Group of the [International Olympic Committee Medical Commission](#), issued a warning about some dietary supplements that are leaving athletes susceptible to failed drugs tests. He said it is now well established that many dietary supplements contain compounds that can cause an athlete to fail a doping test and in some cases the presence of these compounds is not declared on the product label and the amount (for some prohibited substances) that will trigger a positive test is vanishingly small and may not be detected by routine analysis of the supplement.

Professor Maughan added that the potential for such low levels of contamination in a sports supplement to result in adverse test results raises significant concerns for the

manufacture of dietary supplements intended for consumption by athletes liable to regular doping tests. He also remarked that it presents a serious dilemma for [sports supplement](#) manufacturers, athletes, and those responsible for the welfare of athletes.