

FAQ on Sports Foods

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What are Sports Foods?

Sports foods are products specifically formulated for and marketed to sportspeople. They ensure an appropriate supply of fluids, nutrients and/or substances which help the body prepare for, maintain and recover from high intense physical performance. Very intense physical performance is a peculiar condition of use which makes the reference population vulnerable to nutritional deficiencies or even injuries or prone to imbalances.



There are Frequently Asked Questions about sports foods

What is the difference between sports foods and energy drinks? – Sports foods differ dramatically in their composition and usage from energy drinks, which are soft drinks, intended to boost mental energy by the use of stimulants. Energy drinks [1] are not suitable for maintaining or restoring hydration and sodium status, which are key needs of sports people. Sports food has a nutritional composition adapted for a physical activity (before, during and after).

[1] The term “energy drinks” is a designation name and does not refer to any regulatory definition. These beverages are presented by manufacturers as possessing stimulating properties both physically and intellectually. These beverages are not to be confused with “sports drinks”, whose nutritional composition is adapted physical activity (before, during and/or after physical activity). The so-called “energy drinks” contain a mixture of different compounds as caffeine, taurine, glucuronolactone and group B vitamins, sugars or sweeteners. They may also contain extracts of certain plants (ANSES report).

Who are the consumers of food intended for sports people? Are these foods intended for professional sport people only? – Sports foods can be used by any active individuals performing endurance exercise and/ or high intensity performance whether they are professionals, ambitious amateur athletes or sports enthusiasts. Sports foods are used by individuals undertaking all types of exercise including endurance, bodybuilding, and team sports. Sports and physical activity represent a way of life for millions of Europeans, both on a professional or an amateur level. 45% of Europeans practice intense physical activity at least once a week [1].

[1] According to the Special Eurobarometer 412 – Sports and Physical Activity, March 2014

Is there a risk that non-athletes may be confused and consume these products? – The specificities of sports foods are clearly indicated on the product labels, and consumers are provided with adequate and clear information about the intended use of these products. They are also usually sold in a separate section of the store so that consumers are able to clearly distinguish sports foods from foods for general consumption.

Why specific foods for sportspeople? – Sports foods can be presented in many different formats including drinks, powders, bars, gels, and tablets. Generally speaking, sports foods can be divided into different subcategories including:

- **Carbohydrate-rich energy food products:** products high in glycaemic carbohydrates essential before, during and after exercise for providing energy;
- **Carbohydrate-electrolyte solutions:** drinks providing electrolytes and carbohydrates as the major energy source which are effective in maintaining or restoring hydration status and in maintaining endurance and/ or high-intensity performance;
- **Protein and protein components:** high protein and essential amino acids products that help muscle maintenance/gain by ensuring a good synthesis of proteins; and
- **Supplements containing substances such as caffeine, amino acids or creatine:** products which help to improve exercise performance capacity and/or enhance training adaptations by allowing an individual in certain circumstances to tolerate heavier training to a greater degree by helping recover faster or helping to stay injury-free and/or healthy during intense training.

What is the difference between sports foods and doping, and how can consumers be sure that sports foods do not contain doping substances? – SNE members manufacture sports foods applying very stringent Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) to provide sports food consumers with very high anti-doping substances guarantees. SNE members support the development and promotion of

specific standards of quality for sports foods, which will encourage Member States to contribute to the international fight against doping and increase consumer protection.

What are the EU rules on doping? Are there national initiatives in the anti-doping area? –

Many different initiatives are present at national level to provide a solution for anti-doping testing and provide guarantees to consumers, including LGC in the UK, Kölner Liste in Germany and AFNOR in France. In the EU level, in 2021 [the first-ever European wide standard to prevent the presence of doping substances in sports nutrition and food supplements](#) was published. The standard aims to ensure a European referential of protection for sportspeople. SNE served as an observer organisation to this CEN initiative.

What type of information is provided on sport foods labels to help consumers to understand how to use them?– A range of specific information is provided to consumers to explain the correct use of sports foods, including:

- Nutritional characteristics of the product;
- Condition of use whether before, during, or after exercise; and recommendation of daily intake or intake during training, which helps to avoid overdose and provide the right amount of nutrients before, during or after exercise.

What is the added value of sports foods in comparison with foods for normal consumption?

– The following aspects make Sport food so special in comparison with foods for normal consumption:

- Additional nutrients: Sports foods contain a variety of beneficial mineral salts, vitamins and nutrients that are particularly beneficial to athletes before, during and after exercise;
- Good quality of ingredients (example : amino acids);
- Convenience/ easy transport: The convenient form of sports foods makes it easier for athletes to consume high quality nutrients in the right amounts and at the right times. Moreover, sports foods are easy to transport and do not bruise or deteriorate in quality when carried in sports bags. They are also preserved for longer periods of time, in comparison with fruits or other perishable items;
- Information/ education: Sports foods provide a range of specific information to the consumers to explain their intended use, the conditions of use, and recommending the daily intake or intake during training;
- Good Manufacturing Practices for anti-doping substances; and
- Profiling of products or adaptation of the products to the very specific needs.

The situation in the EU



What is the current status of this category at EU level? – On 15 June 2016, the European Commission published a report on food intended for sportspeople, which concluded that sports food could be appropriately regulated under general EU food law, but recognized that the specificities of these foods may have to be taken into account in the application and implementation of the horizontal rules. Some adaptations could be needed to adequately address their specificities. The European Commission specified that it would ensure proper application of horizontal legislation and monitor the developments after 20th July 2016.

Why do sports foods need a clear definition? – A definition of sports foods is currently missing in the European legislation. However, it is essential that a specific definition for sports foods is established at European level in order to distinguish these products- which have been scientifically designed to meet the specific nutritional needs of sports people- from general food products. SNE suggests the following definition: “Sport food” means food specifically designed, formulated and marketed in relation to physical activity, physical performance and/or post-exercise recovery.”

Why a Call has been launched by several EU associations to clarify the future EU legislative framework for Sports food? – Specialised Nutrition Europe (SNE), EU Specialty Food Ingredients, the European Vegetable Protein Association (EUVEPRO) and Food Supplements Europe (FSE) collectively [call for appropriate adaptations to general EU food law and harmonisation in some areas, to ensure the safe use and appropriate labelling of sports food in the EU.](#)

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So far, no such measures have been taken.

Sports foods are a category of food that are specifically formulated to meet the specific nutritional requirements needed to support physical performance (intense/ recreational) and recovery after exercise.

These foods therefore need to:

- Contain nutrients (vitamins, minerals, proteins, amino acids, sugars, etc.) in different levels to those established for normal foods
- Communicate on the intended use of sports foods in order to adequately inform consumers and ensure the correct use of these products ;
- Use nutrition claims that are not allowed for normal foods but are appropriate for sports foods;
- Label the nutritional composition in a way that is relevant for the intended use of sports foods.

The diversity of national rules or interpretations is threatening the functioning of the EU single market, creates operational burdens and hinders innovation for companies. It would also lead to consumers not having access to the same or equivalent products in all Member States.

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About SNE—

Specialised Nutrition Europe (SNE) is the voice of the specialised nutrition industry across Europe. We cover 5 different food categories: Foods for infants and young children, Foods for special medical purposes, Foods for weight control, Sports food, and Gluten free products. Learn more about SNE [here](#)