

Are Supplements Necessary to Make Gains?

One question that I get asked a lot is if nutritional supplements are necessary to make progress in the gym. While this is often a hotly debated topic by fitness professionals it is worth pointing out that there is absolutely no black and white answer on the subject. For this reason I am going to give you two sides of the coin and let you make up your own mind.

Technically speaking, supplements aren't necessary to make progress with your training programme. I have seen people adapt to exercise with a very poor diet and no supplement intervention. They can put on muscle, lose fat and build strength comfortably. Some people think that supplements are too expensive to use and are over-hyped. In a lot of cases this is true, if you look at companies with the big marketing budgets there is a consistent abundance of advertising aimed at improving their sales figures. I have heard how much it costs one of the big UK companies to produce their whey protein and how much they sell it for- it doesn't surprise me some people think it is too much money.

On the other hand supplements can play an important role in maximising your progress. You can improve your hormonal levels which creates a more favourable environment for making gains. Examples of this can be improving your blood sugar levels, testosterone and cortisol ratios as well as your estrogen score. Other examples can be improving organ function to lead to better health and consequently faster gains. Supplements are definitely not a sure-fire way of improving your results. If you are bodybuilding and eating very little protein you are not going to out supplement that void. It is also important to note that the longer you have been training the slower your progress is going to be (not taking into consideration any improvements you make in your training regime through experience) and the need for supplements may therefore increase with training age as your body slows down it's response to exercise.

In my training I encourage the use of a supplement programme. When I train clients it is important that their results are fast and therefore I like to be as precise as I can. Yes- you could eat a meal straight after training to lower your stress response and improve your results but it doesn't have the same effect as having a well designed post-workout shake. If people are on a limited budget or have a personal preference against them then there are things you can do to make the best out of that situation. In my opinion and in my practice I use them for clients aiming for any training goal.

I always encourage my clients to ask for my professional opinion before buying any supplements. It can save them a lot of time and money by resisting the impulse purchases and instead buying supplements which I know would be more effective for their goals.