

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Making Muscles?

If getting yourself in (better) shape was part of your New Year's resolutions, think twice before you decide to try the bottled shortcuts. The image of a slimmer, trimmer you is so worthwhile, go for it! But most of us lose interest after just a few weeks of trying to drag out of bed at 5 am for the jog around the block or the trip to the gym for a workout. Before long, the cost of a bottle of pills to help you build muscle doesn't seem nearly as bad as the exercise.

But, will they have any effect - other than slimming your wallet? Here's the current take on a few of the more popular ones, DHEA, hormones and Creatine. First, bear in mind that all of these are usually made by our bodies as part of their everyday living. So it's not that we are totally lacking in them. Second, remember that what you get in a supplement, no matter what the advertising says, is most probably going to be a synthetic version. They aren't taking it out of some other person to put into the pill for you!

DHEA (dehydroepiandrosterone) is one of the first steps in the production of our sex hormones testosterone and estrogen. If our adrenal glands weren't making it, we'd have no sex hormones or all the good things that go with them. But what can extra from pills do for us? As far as building up muscle, not a whole lot it seems. There was one small study about 10 years ago that said it gave men more muscle. Everything since then has found no effect. They've looked at men and women, young adults and seniors, different doses for different times. No effect on muscles. Right now the big interest is that DHEA does seem to help women with lupus and help slow down osteoporosis in women. But these are also early studies. There's nothing definite yet.

Rather than give something that will be turned into hormones, some people start with the hormones themselves. Testosterone and human growth hormone (sold as HGH) are other supplements being promoted for building muscle. Again, there are a few studies that show that taking one or the other of these hormones for several years does add a few pounds (only about 4 pounds) of muscle. But the extra muscle did not increase the person's strength. And they made no difference in the elderly subjects' ability to manage daily tasks, or in younger ones' exercise endurance.

On the down side, the testosterone might have increased the risk of prostate cancer in elderly men. And the growth hormone caused swelling, painful joints and carpal tunnel syndrome. In fact, the increased weight of muscle might simply have been from more water in the muscle. Some of the men began to show enlarged breasts. Are these worth the risks of messing up your hormones?

Creatine does seem to have a beneficial effect on muscle mass and strength, but only when it is taken along with resistance training. There's pretty good evidence that it does increase endurance in people exercising in short bursts of high intensity. But more effect is found in men than in women. So far, there is very little evidence of any risks or dangers associated with taking creatine.

So, what are you left with? Keep up the exercise! Don't go overboard with 2 hours a day. Not only will you be too sore, you'll burn out fast. Start slow, with what you can handle. Then increase the time gradually. Find a friend to do it with you. Put it on your calendar and make it a priority, just like a doctor's appointment. It is, only better. Vary your exercise. If you're walking, change your route. Walk or run one day, do strength or resistance exercise the next. Don't invest a lot of money in fancy equipment until you're exercising regularly. Just keep it up! That's the best resolution.

Since our bodies need protein to make creatine, and to make muscle, here's an easy meaty soup that uses mixes for flavor. Soup fills you up faster, so it'll help keep you trim too! This recipe makes a lot, so freeze some for a quick meal later. Enjoy!

Taco Soup

1 lb ground beef
1 large onion, chopped
3 16-oz cans Mexican-style chili beans
1 ½ C water
1 4-oz can chopped green chilies
1 pkg taco seasoning mix
1 pkg ranch salad dressing mix

Brown beef in saucepan. Drain off as much fat as possible. Add chopped onion, cook and stir until onion is tender. Stir in rest of ingredients without draining. Bring to boil and simmer 15 minutes, stirring occasionally. Serve with baked tortilla chips. Serves 12. Contains 550 mg sodium, 9 g protein. (From the Simply Florida cookbook, available from our office.)

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