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Alcohol Information Sheet

What is it?

Alcoholic drinks contain varying levels of the chemical ethanol. Alcohol acts as a depressant on the central nervous system and in moderate quantities it creates a feeling of relaxation in the user. It causes the blood vessels to dilate and increases the heart rate.

Why do some athletes use it?

Alcohol does not improve athletic performance, because even in small quantities it can interfere with co-ordination, impair balance and vision, and decrease strength and speed. However, there have been cases of athletes using alcohol to boost their aggression and confidence or to reduce tension and nerves in target sports such as shooting and archery.

Just as in society generally, alcohol is most often used by athletes as a recreational drug, for example when socialising with team mates or celebrating a victory. Some athletes wrongly believe that they can increase their energy levels from the carbohydrates in beer but in fact alcohol is metabolised slowly in the liver and actually contributes nothing to muscle energy.

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What are the risks?

In moderate quantities, alcohol can give the user a feeling of over confidence, causing them to take dangerous risks. Alcohol is a diuretic which can lead to a risk of dehydration. It decreases strength, power, muscular and cardiovascular endurance and impairs reaction time, balance and co-ordination. These effects continue long after the blood alcohol concentration has fallen to zero. So an athlete's performance can be badly affected in competition after a night of only moderate drinking.

Alcohol is addictive and heavy drinking over a long period can cause serious mental and physical disorders. Alcoholics have a high risk of developing pancreas, kidney and liver diseases, as well as causing permanent brain damage and impairing many other chemical and hormonal reactions throughout their body.

Is it banned?

Alcohol is prohibited in competition in certain sports. These include sports requiring control of a vehicle or a weapon such as aeronautics, motor cycling, modern pentathlon and archery. The levels of alcohol permitted in the bloodstream vary from sport to sport and it is the responsibility of the athlete to ensure that they comply with the rules of their sport.

For more information on the status in sport of any licensed substances visit the Drug Information Database at: www.didglobal.com

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See UK Sport's Drug Testing Procedures Leaflet for more information on the role of the advocate available on our website at www.100percentme.co.uk. It is very important for parents to encourage athletes to willingly submit to drug testing. Drug testing is the most effective way for athletes to promote their drug-free status and your support for the programme will enhance this message.

6. Traveling Abroad

If your young athlete is traveling abroad to train or compete, make sure he/she considers the following:

- If a medical condition is ongoing, ensure that sufficient medications are taken to allow continuation of treatment. This will help to avoid using foreign pharmacies.
- Check that the medication your child is taking is permitted by law through customs in that country and ensure that your child has a copy of any prescription for prohibited medication.
- Check all products you or your child buy before leaving and if purchasing products overseas, remind your child to check carefully as common medications can and do contain different substances than those purchased in the UK.
- Provide your child with a selection of permitted medications for common illnesses that he/she may suffer from. For example, permitted medication for hay fever, diarrhoea, cold/flu and headaches is useful to carry to avoid using foreign medication.
- Ensure your child has a copy of UK Sport's advice card of prohibited and permitted medications to take with them.
- Write down the number of the Anti-Doping Agency of the country your child is traveling to in case they need to contact them for advice on their regulations and doping issues. Check UK Sport's website at www.didglobal.com for this information.

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