**Creatine: The Basics**

**What is creatine?**

Creatine in this context is a dietary supplement for athletic performance enhancement. I say “dietary supplement” because you already consume it naturally in meat and fish, and your liver and kidneys produce it naturally as well. I say “*performance* enhancement” to make it clear that creatine itself will not make you bigger or help you lose weight; it will only help you to work harder and recover more quickly. Point being that if you don’t put the work in it’s not going to do anything for you.

**Does it work?**

Creatine supplementation has been thoroughly researched. There have been well over 100 peer reviewed studies published on the topic (link to meta-analysis below), and the short answer is yes. HOWEVER, it is important to understand that creatine is for short, intense bursts of exercise, like lifting heavy weights or sprinting (stuff you can do for about 20 seconds or less). It has not been shown to improve performance for endurance athletes.

**How Does It Work?**

Creatine is a necessary ingredient for the production of ATP, which is your body’s energy source. Without enough creatine, your body can’t make enough ATP to meet the demands of high intensity activities.

**How much and how often?**

Understanding dosage is important. More is not necessarily better, since everything your body doesn’t use is just going to go down the toilet. Studies have shown that starting out with a 5 day loading period, during which time the participants consumed 20 grams of creatine a day, was slightly more effective than diving right into a lower, set dosage. After the five day loading period, participants then lowered their daily intake to about 3-5 grams and successfully maintained muscle saturation.

If you’re a smaller person, you can probably get away with 15 grams a day for your loading phase and 3 grams a day for your daily maintenance portion after that. If you’re bigger and have more lean muscle mass to load up then I would start with 25 grams a day for the first five days and then go down to four or five grams a day.

There are a lot of different opinions out there about optimal dosage, but this approach has been studied thoroughly and shown to be effective.

**Are there negative side effects?**

The most commonly mentioned, however rare, side effects are diarrhea and intestinal discomfort. Long term studies are still being conducted to determine whether or not there are long term side effects. Again though, creatine in the recommended amount is considered to be very safe, as it occurs naturally in the body already and is consumed regularly in foods such as meat and fish.

**What kind should you get?**

Creatine Monohydrate is the way to go. It is the most thoroughly studied by far and no imitation has been tested with the same results. Save yourself some money and ignore gimmicks about “fast absorption” etc. The cheapest one you can find should work just as well as anything else.

I hope this was helpful! Comment below if you have questions or requests!

Branch, D. (2003). Effect of Creatine Supplementation on Body Composition and Performance: A Meta-analysis. *International Journal of Sport Nutrition and Exercise Metabolism, vol. 13.* 198-226