

## [The lazy logic of banning sports supplements](#) [1]

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Most of us are used to prohibitionists banning things that are thought of as being unhealthy. But the fact that the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) [has decided to ban DMAA](#) [3], an ingredient used in popular sports supplements, is a little more surprising. DMAA is used in pre-workout products, intended to give athletes greater focus and energy. Even the most ardent paternalists tend to be supporters of greater public fitness.

The most popular product containing this ingredient is Jack3d, a product aimed at weight training enthusiasts. Fears have risen about the active ingredient as it has been linked to increased blood pressure and heart rate. However, the quantity of DMAA in the recommended dose has been [shown to elevate these by the same levels as 2-3 cups of coffee](#) [4].

One death has been associated with DMAA, where in New Zealand a man took a dosage of some 30-60 times greater than the recommended dose given for formulated sports products. This was combined with an unknown quantity of alcohol. DMAA has been used in fitness products for years, with millions of doses taken by gym-goers. Meanwhile paracetamol was [responsible for 507 accidental deaths from 1993-7 in England and Wales alone](#) [5], and remains legal.

This is just the latest in a legal war on the fitness industry, but also a by-product of the impact that competitive sports has on the regulatory process. The supplement in question has been banned by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) for some time. WADA's Director of Legal has stated that WADA continues to work closely with the MHRA. This closeness puts non-professional users at risk.

Individuals are best placed to judge these risks for themselves. Relegating those things that regulators consider as bad for us to the black market restricts information on safe use, and could genuinely endanger users.

A system which has state officials tell us products are either 'safe' or 'unsafe' reduces personal responsibility, and encourages complacency. Every decision carries risk, and consumers would be better protected by us being open about that than by treating them as infants.

For now, many users on message boards across the internet are discussing how to ensure they can pile up a 'stash' of these products. It looks unlikely that rendering their supply illegal will stop people looking for an edge in fitness. Casting them into the domain of the black market will only help those who are willing and able to sell them illicitly.

**Source URL:** <http://www.adamsmith.org/blog/liberty-justice/the-lazy-logic-of-banning-sports-supplements>

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[2] <http://www.adamsmith.org/authors/pete-spence>

[3] <http://www.mhra.gov.uk/NewsCentre/Pressreleases/CON180711>

[4] [http://www.fitrx.com/fitrx/images/banner/dmaa\\_safety.pdf](http://www.fitrx.com/fitrx/images/banner/dmaa_safety.pdf)

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