

In the sports world, victory can be just inches or seconds away.

Think about [‘The Longest Yard’](#) in Super Bowl 34 between the Tennessee Titans and St. Louis Rams. In the final play of the game, one yard was all that stood between the Titans and the Vince Lombardi Trophy.

Or look at the [2024 Summer Olympics](#)! Noah Lyles earned the United States a gold medal after winning by just five thousandths of a second in the 100-meter final.

Athletes look for game changers to help propel themselves ahead of the competition, and creatine has entered the chat.

Who does creatine work for?

“Creatine, when used appropriately, can improve your max power. It can help with muscle growth in certain individuals, it typically does not have as significant of an impact when you're doing more endurance-based sports,” says [Karan Rai](#), MD, a sports medicine physician with OSF HealthCare. “If you're a weekend warrior or CrossFit athlete trying to get a little extra boost, while practicing appropriate hydration and dietary intake, I think creatine has benefits.”

Dr. Rai adds that in the realm of supplements, creatine has been “decently studied over the years.” He says football players, power lifters and track sprinters could benefit from the supplement. However, if you’re training for an upcoming Ironman or triathlon, it’s really not necessary.

Hydrate, hydrate, hydrate!

It’s no surprise that extreme exercise increases the amount we sweat. With or without creatine, that’s reason enough to up your water intake. But Dr. Rai says with creatine, there’s an added reason to why water is so important.

“Commonly I’ll find someone who is new to using a supplement and they’ll come see me and talk about muscle cramps or excessive fatigue after their workouts,” Dr. Rai says. Oftentimes it’s because of an imbalance in their intake, whether that’s food intake or hydration.”

If you already cramp constantly or are not as experienced in weight training, Dr. Rai would recommend caution in using creatine. He says to talk to your primary care physician or a sports medicine physician to see if creatine is a beneficial option for you.

Best times to use creatine

Before and/or after your workouts are times Dr. Rai recommends taking creatine. He says like most dietary changes, don’t rush it.

"When someone is using creatine, I recommend they start slowly. Typically, utilizing it before the workout and making sure your workout is power based vs. endurance-based matters," Dr. Rai says. "Just starting off, depending on the serving size, use one to two scoops."

Careful with the caffeine!

Avoid a ton of caffeine consumption if you're using creatine. Caffeine can elevate the heart rate and creatine can cause cramping, so combining those things could lead to "adverse outcomes," Dr. Rai says.

"Supplements are meant for augmentation," Dr. Rai adds. "A healthy diet, hydrating appropriately while cultivating your goals, whether you're a power or endurance athlete, gives the max benefit. Really we should be looking at creatine or sports drinks as a way to augment and get that extra 5-10% we are pushing for, based off our goals."

If you're looking to add creatine to your lifestyle, Dr. Rai recommends creating an individualized plan with your doctor or sports medicine team.

Due to limited data, the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) does not recommend creatine for kids under 18.