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Boosting Testosterone & Enhancing Performance



Sports Nutrition

Hormonal balance and endurance are often concerns for competitive athletes.

One botanical is making strides in sports nutrition applications.

• **CASE
STUDY**

Boosting Testosterone & Enhancing Performance

by Judd Handler

Is modern man not so manly?

It seems so based on the deluge of late-night television and drive-time AM talk radio

commercials offering solutions for the modern physiological phenomenon colloquially known as “low T,” or low testosterone.

In fact, the commercials aren’t lying. One study reports average testosterone levels in American men have been substantially decreasing since 1988.¹

So, what’s a man—or a woman concerned about hormonal balance—to do about the consequences of low testosterone, which include low libido, fatigue and excess abdominal fat?

There are, of course, synthetic testosterone boosters, but those may have harmful side effects. There’s also hormone replacement therapy or bioidentical hormones. But these methods are costly and require the supervision of a health professional.

A safer and easier alternative for raising testosterone is the adaptogenic herb ashwagandha.



Perhaps no other botanical solution is more supported by peer-reviewed research for its ability to naturally boost testosterone than ashwagandha. And although ashwagandha isn't a household name like "low T," this Ayurvedic herb with more than 5,000 years of medicinal history is a chief ingredient in two best-selling products.

Blue Star Nutraceuticals: Status

Blue Star Nutraceuticals is a Canadian company, although most of its sales are in the United States. Blue Star's flagship product, Status, was released to market in June 2016. Its slogan is "Testosterone made easy." Currently, Status is a top-10 Amazon best-seller in the category of Sports Nutrition Testosterone Boosters.

David Gundermann, Ph.D., Blue Star's chief scientific officer, formulated Status shortly after joining the company. Surprisingly, he had not heard of ashwagandha nor the term "adaptogens" prior to late 2015.

He was quickly converted by the convincing research supporting ashwagandha's cortisol-lowering and testosterone-boosting actions. One particular study stood out for Gundermann. Published in November 2015, it demonstrated the ashwagandha intervention group had an increase in serum testosterone of 434 percent.^{2,3}

Status uses this statistic as a main selling point on its product page. The Web copy boldly claims, "Same workout. 434% more testosterone," implying ashwagandha, featured as the most abundant botanical in Status' formula, is an easy solution for rapidly increasing natural testosterone production, and is more effective at boosting testosterone than lifting weights alone.

"The first time I heard of ashwagandha was when I read that research study," Gundermann said. "I was looking for recent studies on anything that would boost testosterone."

When asked if he was skeptical when he first came across the study, Gundermann replied, "I would always be skeptical of any claim that's not based on science. I would only use something that's published in a peer-reviewed journal in the first place. I don't just go on the internet and see whatever Google pulls up. When I find this new ingredient that I've never heard of, I'll look through the research, I'll look through the methods, and I'll look through the analyses."

Gundermann continued, "Scientific papers can make any logical conclusions based on their data, so it's important to go through the data and go through the methods to determine if the analyses and conclusions are accurate and make sense. Another thing to examine is whether the control group is valid. When other companies make conclusions, I always go back to the original data to make sure their conclusions actually match up to the conclusions that would actually come from that data; it doesn't always add up. Because I went directly to the research itself, I have more confidence in my interpretation of the data rather than someone else's."



When he came across the study that concluded ashwagandha boosted testosterone 434 percent, he calculated the quantitative effect in the active intervention group and was greatly impressed with how much greater the response of testosterone was with ashwagandha, compared to other botanicals.

Gundermann stated he was looking for an ingredient in Status that supported claims of testosterone-boosting and ultimately chose ashwagandha. He also considered the botanical *Tribulus terrestris*, but ultimately decided, “We have used tribulus in the past; however, convincing data on the benefits of tribulus are being overridden and thus it has not been included in any of our current formulas.”

One possible theory why testosterone levels have precipitously declined is connected to the potential for a product like Status. It is suggested that lifestyle and environmental factors have led to chronic cortisol production in the general population. Virtually everybody wants to have more energy, endurance and sex drive, and less body fat, along with other benefits of increased testosterone. But a constant flood of cortisol in the bloodstream makes these attributes unattainable for most people.

Because increased testosterone can help nearly everyone achieve these desirable outcomes—without the need for Olympic-style training—Gundermann said Status is Blue Star Nutraceuticals’ best-selling product.

“The major selling points of Status are boosting testosterone, helping build muscle and losing body fat,” he stated, adding that increasing libido is a secondary selling feature of the product.

However, judging by the product’s webpage, increased libido seems like a prominent selling point. Under the subheading, “24/7 on-demand libido & stamina,” the copy suggests, “Women love a man with muscles.” This claim is supported by the explanation, “Research shows that women find men with muscular chests, big shoulders, and a tight waist to be the most attractive men.”⁴

Gundermann stated after he was first introduced to the testosterone-boosting effects of ashwagandha, he looked further into the research and found the other claims that can be made for the benefits of taking Status, including strength, power, energy, lean muscle and faster recovery.

“Because of how ashwagandha can control for cortisol, it can have so many versatile applications,” he maintained.

While the study that led to Gundermann’s discovery of ashwagandha as an efficacious ingredient for testosterone-boosting in Status involved just 29 treatment subjects, he commented, “For an intervention study of this nature, that’s actually not a small sample size. With all the controls that are in place ... that would be an appropriate sample size for something of this nature.”

Gundermann added, “I specifically picked KSM-66 because of its established scientific evidence. I haven’t found any other ingredient for boosting testosterone with this much research.”



One might assume Status is heavily marketed to bodybuilders and weightlifters; its product webpage features a lean, muscular model with chiseled abs. But Gundermann maintains Status is geared toward average men.

“We’re marketing more to individuals who don’t already have chiseled physiques,” he explained. “The direction of the company is to market toward mainstream males who are trying to change their physique for the better. Status is marketed to people who haven’t tried any product like this before.”

Gundermann said although he hasn’t personally received testimonials with quantitative reports of muscle strength gain, from a purely subjective, anecdotal perspective, customer feedback has noted substantial improvements in physique and life in general.

“It’s been a really good market reception,” he concluded. Gundermann even offers his opinion of the product on the Status webpage: “I firmly believe Status helps to naturally optimize testosterone levels, restore vitality, and enrich men to live a lifestyle truly worthy of today’s modern man.”

Although Status is marketed toward men, increased testosterone can benefit women as well. Gundermann said Blue Star will soon offer a product featuring KSM-66 Ashwagandha geared toward women’s health. The company will also be coming out with other products featuring KSM-66.

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DreamBrand is another company using KSM-66 Ashwagandha. The company’s Mdrive line of products, including Elite, is mainly marketed to endurance athletes. Mdrive’s product marketing is armed with clinical support that KSM-66 Ashwagandha improves VO₂max, increases endurance and speeds recovery time, in addition to reducing body fat and cortisol levels.^{5,6}

Mdrive’s product ambassador team includes some of the world’s top endurance athletes, such as adventure racer Paul Romero, who is featured on Elite’s product

packaging with the glowing testimonial, “Mdrive Elite is far and away the most complete and powerful supplement I’ve used in over 20 years of racing.”

The research concluding ashwagandha—specifically a full-spectrum extract of it, such as KSM-66—can boost VO₂max is all the more impressive, considering the trial subjects. In the VO₂max study, the group was professional cyclists. Best-selling author and natural health expert David Perlmutter, M.D., stated in his blog, “Considering the fact that it is difficult to detect minor changes in elite athletes, this study was the first of its kind to document the significant improvements in aerobic performance with regard to cardiorespiratory and cardiovascular endurance of elite athletes.”⁷

Cecile Kehoe, COO of DreamBrands, said the rationale for creating Mdrive Elite was to devise a blend of “powerful adaptogens that would work with the body to make it the best it



Endurance athletes need to activate every source of energy in their body to retain a competitive advantage. For this reason, Kehoe said having a clinically tested, safe and effective adaptogen is one of the main selling points the brand emphasizes.



can be.” She stated ashwagandha was chosen as the chief botanical in the product formulation because it has a long history as a safe and effective adaptogen.

Mdrive Elite has been on the market since 2013, and Kehoe maintains the reception has been excellent. “We sell Mdrive Elite in multiple retail stores and online. We have many endurance athletes that take Elite and have numerous testimonials to how it has helped them move to the next level,” she claimed, adding sales of Mdrive Elite have increased steadily every year.

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Like Gundermann, she said DreamBrands specifically chose KSM-66 because of the quantity and quality of its clinical research.


“KSM-66 Ashwagandha is one of the most vigorously studied ingredients I have come across,” stated Kehoe, who first encountered KSM-66 at SupplySide West. Other notable traits that stood out to Kehoe were the fact that it is unique as a full-spectrum ashwagandha extract, and the full traceability associated with a controlled supply chain.

When asked roughly what percentage of Mdrive Elite customers are “regular men” who might be moderately active but want to improve their libido, Kehoe responded, “That’s tough to say. Most of our Mdrive Elite users tend to just want to be better and train harder at whatever it is they’re already doing. I’m guessing most of the men using our product are seeking results in their active lifestyles. But getting some support in their sexual health is a nice bonus.”

Although Mdrive Elite’s slogan, “Because Not All Men Are Created Equal,” is unequivocal in the gender it’s marketing to, she said many of Mdrive’s customers are women.

“We have many female athletes that take Elite,” Kehoe noted, adding she personally has been using Elite on a daily basis for more than two years and has experienced an increase in energy, strength, faster recovery, reduction in daily stress levels and improved mood.

She said stress reduction is another strong selling point for the ashwagandha in Mdrive Elite. After all, endurance athletes may experience extreme physiological stress, which is associated with temporary immunosuppression and higher risk of infection.⁸

With clinical support that KSM-66 Ashwagandha may help endurance athletes perform longer, recover faster, and experience improved immune function, Mdrive is indeed a dream brand. 

Judd Handler is a California-based health writer and lifestyle coach.

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