

What can Erythropoietin do for you?

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Erythropoietin is an effective drug to increase your number of red blood cells. It is primarily used in anemic patients with cancer and on dialysis, but it is also popular with athletes that want to (illegally) increase their endurance performance, most notably cyclists and cross country skiers.

Although the typical work of a scientist is a very different from a cyclist performing in the Tour de France, a first case of erythropoietin use (or rather misuse) has now been reported in Germany. A neurobiology postdoc working on the role of erythropoietin in Alzheimer disease has apparently had the idea to do a little self-experimenting – probably thinking of the famous experiment by Barry Marshall that won him a Nobel Prize. Or he was pictured – during his long experiments lasting well into the night – the famous German cross country skier Johann Mühlegg who tried to win an Olympic Gold medal in Salt Lake City with the help of darbepoetin. What he didn't think of was the price of erythropoietin. After burning some 20.000 Euro, the technician and then the principal investigator became suspicious. The case is now under investigation by the university and the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft. What the authorities don't know is how to handle this case. Is this simply misappropriation of the research funds, is this brain doping, or is this a misunderstood brilliant scientist? The World Anti-Brain Doping Authority now got involved to help clear the issues.