

# STEROIDS

## WHAT ARE ANABOLIC STEROIDS?

Androgenic-Anabolic steroids are man-made drugs that mimic the natural male sex hormone testosterone. They are commonly known simply as "steroids."

"Anabolic" means building muscle, or promoting growth. "Androgenic" means causing male sex characteristics.

Steroids are not new. They were first made in the 1930's. There are more than 100 types of anabolic steroids and each requires a prescription.

Anabolic steroids are different from corticosteroids found in some skin creams and asthma inhalers. Corticosteroids have no muscle building effects.

Anabolic steroids, obtained illegally through the Internet, illegal labs, or gyms are usually taken by mouth or injected. Some of the commonly abused steroids are Anadrol, Dianabol, Winstrol, Deca-Durabolin, Oxandrin, or Depot-Testosterone. Some people also use steroids meant for animals. Slang terms for steroids include "Arnolds, Gym Candy, Juice, Pumpers, Stackers, or Weight Trainers."

## ARE THERE LEGITIMATE MEDICAL USES FOR ANABOLIC STEROIDS?

In limited cases, doctors prescribe an anabolic steroid drug to treat delayed puberty, impotence, and body wasting in patients with AIDS and other diseases. Because of side effects, they are used only with close medical supervision. Doses taken by abusers can be up to 100 times greater than doses used for treating medical conditions.

## WHY DO PEOPLE USE ANABOLIC STEROIDS?

Beginning in the 1950's steroid use was associated with bodybuilders. As time went on, it became known that some professional athletes used steroids to increase body weight and muscle strength.

Steroid use has typically been highest among young male athletes. While steroids do appear to increase muscle mass, strength and endurance, the ability to succeed in competitive sports also depends on skill, mental alertness,

diet, rest, cardiovascular health and drive. Once steroid use stops, weight and muscle gains are lost.

Rates of use by young women have been quickly catching up to the men. As participation in sports by girls and women increases, so has their use of steroids. Many girls, like the guys, want to get bigger, a slightly muscular look, and feel stronger on the playing field. The rail-thin look has been replaced by the 'six-pack' look among both males and females.

Today, many steroid users – both men and women – take the drug not to run faster, jump higher, or throw harder, but simply to look better. People obsessed with their appearance, much like those with eating disorders, seek steroids as a short cut to looking 'buff' and gaining an edge. Others noted for having sought steroids illegally include those whose jobs require strength despite long hours or stress such as military personnel, law enforcement, firefighters and security guards.

## WHAT ARE THE HEALTH RISKS AND SIDE EFFECTS?

In fact, the harmful side effects of illegal steroid use far outweigh the benefits. Both men and women risk acne – especially on face and back, heart problems, liver damage, aching joints, increased chance of injury to tendons, ligaments and muscles, trembling, and exposure to HIV or Hepatitis from injecting and using needles.

## WHAT HEALTH RISKS ARE UNIQUE FOR MALES?

Male use can result in baldness, difficulty or pain urinating, breast development, enlarged prostate and impotence.

## WHAT HEALTH RISKS ARE UNIQUE FOR FEMALES?

Females may experience hair growth on the face, breast reduction, lowering of the voice, and changes in menstruation cycle. Due to the possible risks to the fetus, a woman should not use steroids during pregnancy or when considering pregnancy.

## ARE THERE SPECIAL RISKS FOR ADOLESCENTS?

The health risks and side effects mentioned above affect young people as well as adults. In addition, steroid use during adolescence can halt growth prematurely by causing closure of the growth plates in bones. Steroid use can also interfere with normal sexual maturation. Since many effects of steroid use are permanent, use in early years can mean a lifetime of consequences.

## HOW WIDESPREAD IS TEENAGE STEROID USE?

Steroid abuse by young people was first addressed as a problem in the late 1980's. Use of steroids among young people has increased steadily since 1991 – up to 5 percent of high school girls and 7 percent of middle school girls admit trying anabolic steroids at least once, according to various studies. Recent trend data tracked by the Risk Behavior Surveillance System at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, showed that nationally the percent of high school students that admitted to using steroid pills or shots without a doctor's prescription one or more times had climbed from 3.7% in 1999 to 6.1% in 2003. In Michigan, the 2003 Risk Behavior Survey showed 4.7% of male high school students had used steroids compared to 2.6% females.

Attitudes toward steroids are changing among young people. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse's Monitoring the Future Survey, in 2004, fewer 12th graders thought that steroids posed a 'great risk' compared to 1998.

## OTHER RISKS?

Some steroid abusers experience withdrawal symptoms when they stop taking the drug—such as mood swings, fatigue, restlessness, difficulty sleeping and depression—that can last for a year or more.

Because of the intense pain that can occur, some steroid users may become dependent on painkillers and opiate drugs. Others may seek anti-depressants to combat the depression.

People who seek steroids may also seek supplements such as DHEA and androstenedione (known as Andro) – sought because of potential anabolic effects. These are known as precursor steroids; they act like steroids but are not steroids. In October 2004 a Federal bill was signed into law outlawing the sale of most of these precursor steroid substances.

## WHAT CAN BE DONE TO PREVENT STEROID USE?

The desire for physical attractiveness or for athletic success can be strong. Credible factual information about the serious risks of steroid use should be provided to all young people, not athletes alone. Young people should be informed of the risks of steroids early, before use starts. Coaches and other adults involved in youth sports or gyms can send a strong, clear message that steroids have no place in athletics. They can stress that non-medical use of steroids is unhealthy, unsafe, against the law and it is cheating. Medical personnel need to learn about the misuse of legally prescribed steroids so that they can monitor such prescriptions carefully.

Parents can help prevent steroid use by helping their children feel worthwhile for who they are more than for how they look or how well they perform. Sound health values are also important to help young people prize their overall long-term health instead of seeking the effects of steroids.

Finally, all of us can work to reduce our society's pressures to over-emphasize a certain "body beautiful" or athletic success.

## LEGAL INFORMATION

In Michigan, anabolic steroids are legally available only by prescription. They are classified as Schedule III controlled substances. Use and first time possession are a misdemeanor; second time possession and delivery are a felony crime.

Educational and recreational athletic facilities are required by law to post signs warning of the dangers of steroids.

Federal law also classes steroids as a controlled substance. Distribution or possession of these drugs for non-medical reasons is a federal offense.

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