

THE BASICS

Drugs & Sports

Do you know?

- Anabolic steroids are chemically manufactured drugs. They are a man-made version of testosterone, the male sex hormone.
- Athletes and body builders take anabolic steroids to make their muscles bigger and stronger. The drug also keeps their energy high so they can train longer and harder without getting tired and sore.
- Some men take steroids because they think they will look better with bigger muscles.
- It is illegal to sell anabolic steroids for the purpose of improving a person's performance in sports.
- There are a few very specific medical uses for anabolic steroids, including treatment for some forms of breast cancer and blood disorders and for people who are not growing properly.
- Some athletes take 5 to 10 times the amount that a doctor might prescribe for legitimate medical uses. Some body builders and weight lifters may take 200 times the prescribed amount.
- Steroids are taken by mouth or by injection. Athletes usually take them in a cycle that lasts from four to 18 weeks. The cycle includes starting with low doses of more than one steroid, then gradually increasing the dose, then stopping use entirely. This is called "stacking."

Stunted Growth

When young people take steroids, they are risking an extremely serious consequence: the drug may prevent them from growing to their full height.

- Some athletes take other drugs besides anabolic steroids in an attempt to improve their performance. For example:
 - stimulants (drugs that make them more alert and delay tiredness, allowing them to train longer). These may include pseudoephedrine or caffeine.
 - analgesics (substances that act on the brain and spinal cord to reduce the amount of pain that is felt). An example is ibuprofen.
 - diuretics (drugs that cause quick but temporary weight loss). An example is caffeine.
 - marijuana (a drug that may have a calming effect).

Short-term Effects

While using anabolic steroids a person may:

- be able to exercise longer and harder without getting tired
- become stronger
- have feelings of confidence and enthusiasm
- feel aggressive and irritable (known as "roid rage")
- have mood swings (feel happy one minute and sad the next)
- feel anxious and unable to sleep well
- feel depressed (sad)
- have headaches, stomach aches and nosebleeds
- have high blood pressure and a faster heart rate

Other drugs used to enhance performance also have serious side effects, especially when combined with anabolic steroids.

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Long-term Effects

After heavy use of anabolic steroids over a long period of time, a person may experience:

- an increase in muscle size and rapid weight gain (5 to 10 kg in 6 to 12 weeks)
- acne (pimples and cysts on the face, upper back, shoulders and arms)
- a “moon face” (the face becomes round in appearance)
- less flexible muscles and ruptured tendons
- jaundice (the whites of the eyes or the skin take on a yellowish tinge, which is a sign of liver problems)
- liver damage that cannot be cured
- stroke or heart attack caused by blood clots and hardening of the arteries
- paranoid feelings (feeling scared or suspicious for no reason)
- a tendency to be violent in their behaviour

Tolerance and Dependence

- People using steroids can become psychologically dependent (they feel they need it) as well as physically dependent (the body needs it).
- Tolerance (a need for more steroids to get the desired effect) does not develop in users.

Withdrawal Symptoms

- Withdrawal symptoms include loss of appetite, throwing up, headaches, and sweating.
- Users may feel dizzy, irritable and sad.
- Users may crave the drug.

Other Risks

- Girls and women who use steroids for a long time may experience changes to their bodies that may be irreversible:
 - hair growth on their faces and bodies
 - lowered voices
 - irregular menstrual periods
 - a reduction in the size of their breasts
 - male pattern baldness
 - the inability to become pregnant

- Boys and men who use steroids for a long time may experience changes to their bodies:
 - the development of breasts
 - a reduction in the size of their testicles
 - the inability to have sexual intercourse (impotence)
 - a drop in their sperm count and temporary infertility (cannot become a father)
- For those who inject, sharing needles can lead to infections such as HIV and hepatitis.

REMEMBER: A person's experience with any drug can vary. Here are a few of the many things that may affect the experience: the amount and strength of the drug taken, the setting, a person's mood and expectations before taking the drug, gender, overall health, past experience with that drug and whether more than one drug is being used at the same time. Using alcohol and other drugs at the same time can be dangerous.

Sources and For More Information

ABCs of Steroids (information sheet), Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission, 2003.

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National Institute on Drug Abuse Website: www.nida.nih.gov

Steroids (brochure), Addiction Research Foundation, 1997.

Straight Facts about Drugs and Drug Abuse, Health Canada, 2000.

Street Drugs: A Drug Identification Guide, Publishers Group, LLC, Plymouth, MN, 2005.

For more information or for help with a drug or alcohol problem: Contact your local Addictions Foundation of Manitoba (AFM) office or visit the website at www.afm.mb.ca. AFM offers a broad range of prevention and rehabilitation services, including harm reduction and abstinence-based programs for alcohol, other drugs and gambling.

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