

Facts about Steroids

Androgenic-Anabolic Steroids are man-made drugs whose actions mimic those of the natural male hormone testosterone. These steroids have two main effects: masculinizing (Androgenic) effects and tissue building (anabolic) effects. They are designed to affect the growth of the male reproductive system, growth of body hair, and deepening of the voice and to stimulate the development of bone, muscle, and skin. Androgenic-Anabolic steroids are used in medical treatment of asthma, arthritis, breast cancer, injuries, growth problems, and chemotherapy. When used without the instructions of a doctor, however, they can cause long-term or irreversible problems.

Steroids and Athletic Performance: Steroids do appear to increase muscle mass, strength, and endurance. However, athletic ability also depends on skill, mental alertness, diet, rest, cardiovascular health, and genetic inheritance. The misuse of steroids may lead to health conditions such as liver tumors, jaundice, fluid retention, and high blood pressure. Experts in sports medicine agree that using steroids poses unacceptable health risks to the athlete.

Steroids are controlled substances. In 1991, steroids were classified as a "controlled substance," which means that the manufacture, distribution, and possession of the drugs for use carry tough legal penalties under federal law. The maximum penalty for trafficking and illegal dispensing is five years in prison and a fine of \$250,000. Several states have enacted even more stringent controls on these drugs. In addition, steroid use has been banned from sports competitions since it was officially outlawed at the 1973 Olympic Games.

Steroids are dangerous. Males who use steroids improperly may experience shrinking testicles, low sperm counts, infertility, baldness and enlarged nipples. Females who use steroids improperly may report deepening of the voice, development of facial hair, menstrual irregularities, and irreversible male pattern baldness. Steroid misuse may also result in premature halting of bone growth in young people before they reach their full height, increased problems with acne, and psychological effects, such as inappropriate anger, destructive (including suicidal) behavior, depression, paranoia, and uncontrollable violence. Sharing unsterile needles for injecting steroids increases the risk of HIV infection.

Using steroids is cheating. The pressure to win may be great, especially if steroids are used by competitors. However, the use of any chemical to gain an advantage over another player is a violation of fair play. For this reason, most sports organizations condemn steroid use. Athletes who cheat by using steroids risk more than being caught. Their careers may be short-lived and plagued with health and psychological problems. Some athletes might be willing to give up good health and careers for a few chances to win. Others with proper nutrition and training achieve the same strength gains over time without the side effects of steroids.

Steroids are abused. The beginning steroid abuser is typically an 18-year-old male who wants to enhance his muscular appearance. Abusers may take many different steroids at once, or one after the other, or take steroids in combination with other illegal drugs. Steroids are usually taken in doses that are two to 200 times higher than medically recommended. Steroids manufactured for non-medical use are often impure, mislabeled, extremely hazardous or simply bogus.

Steroids have serious side effects. It is estimated that up to one million people in the U.S. take steroids for non-medical reasons. The non-medical use of steroids has been condemned by the American Medical Association, the American College Health Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American College of Sports Medicine, the National Strength and Conditioning Association, the National Collegiate Athletic Association, the National Football League, and the United States and International Olympic Committees.

If you or a family member is experiencing a mental health or an alcohol or other drug-related emergency, seek immediate assistance by calling the 24-hour Suicide Prevention, Mental Health Crisis, Information and Referral Hotline: (216) 623-6888 or the United Way's First Call for Help, 211 or (216) 436-2000.