

STEROIDS

WHAT ARE ANABOLIC STEROIDS?

These are synthetic compounds that resemble the male sex hormone testosterone. They are commonly known simply as "steroids." The more technical term is "anabolic androgenic 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.

Anabolic steroids are different from cortical steroids. Cortical steroids are anti-inflammatory drugs, and are sometimes used to treat severe asthma or arthritis.

Anabolic steroids may be taken orally or by injection into muscle tissue.

ARE THERE LEGITIMATE MEDICAL USES FOR ANABOLIC STEROIDS?

In limited cases, these drugs can be used in medical treatment for certain growth disorders in adolescents, anemia, and the effects of severe burns. They are used only with a prescription and under close medical supervision.

WHY DO PEOPLE USE ANABOLIC STEROIDS?

Non-medical use does occur, despite significant health risks. Some athletes use steroids to increase body weight and muscle strength. Such use began in the 1950's. However, these effects are achieved only in combination with intense weight training and special diet, not by using the drugs alone.

Once steroid use stops, weight and muscle gains are lost.

Other people, young males in particular, use steroids purely as an aid in body building—to "look good at the beach."

Steroids also increase aggression in some users. This is seen as an asset among certain athletes (such as football players) and in some people with dangerous jobs.

WHAT ARE THE HEALTH RISKS AND SIDE EFFECTS?

Anabolic steroid users are at risk for the following:

- heart disease, stroke, and high blood pressure
- liver disease and jaundice
- severe, scarring acne
- HIV/ AIDS, if needles are shared
- emotional problems, including depression and uncontrollable rage

Aggressive behavior caused by steroid use can also lead to injury and death in violent encounters, risky driving, or other dangerous behavior.

WHAT HEALTH RISKS ARE UNIQUE FOR MALES?

Male users risk sterility, impotence, shrinkage of the testicles, and breast enlargement.

WHAT HEALTH RISKS ARE UNIQUE FOR FEMALES?

Female users risk sterility, clitoral enlargement, decreased breast size, deepening of the voice, male pattern baldness, and growth of facial and body hair. The baldness and increased facial and body hair are permanent. Steroid use can also stop or cause changes in the menstrual 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. A 1988 national survey found that 6.6% of high school seniors had used or still used steroids. Over two thirds of the users began at age 16 or younger. One quarter of the users said they used steroids not to improve in sports, but to build muscles to look good.

A 1990 Michigan study found similar patterns. Eight percent of 10th and 12th grade students had used steroids in the past year. Five percent were still using the drugs. One quarter of the users began use during junior high or earlier.

The study found that steroids were used by almost as many female athletes as males. It also found that steroids were used in sports such as gymnastics and hockey, not just the so-called strength sports of wrestling and football.

National surveys have found steroid use among all ages, especially young adults.

The 1994 National Household Survey found steroid use (at least once) by 0.7% of 12 to 17 year olds, 1.1% of 18 to 25 year olds, and 1.0% of 26-34 year olds. Use in the past year was reported by .5% of 12-17 year olds, .6% of 18-25 year olds, and .1% of 26-34 year olds.

A national survey of high school seniors shows steroid use relatively steady from 1989 to 1998. Use in the past month was reported by .6% to 1.1% of high school seniors. Use by eighth and tenth graders was slightly lower.

Steroids are still a problem, however, as indicated by cases of their abuse by athletes in the Olympics and elsewhere.

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. Both the school and the home should be part of these efforts.

Coaches and other adults involved in youth sports 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,

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.

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.

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