

STEROIDS

Anabolic-androgenic steroids are man-made substances related to male sex hormones. “Anabolic” refers to muscle-building, and “androgenic” refers to increased masculine characteristics. “Steroids” refers to the class of drugs. These drugs are available legally only by prescription, to treat conditions that occur when the body produces abnormally low amounts of testosterone, such as delayed puberty and some types of impotence. They are also prescribed to treat body wasting in patients with AIDS and other diseases that result in loss of lean muscle mass. Abuse of anabolic steroids, however, can lead to serious health problems, some irreversible.

Today, athletes and others abuse anabolic steroids to enhance performance and also to improve physical appearance. Anabolic steroids are taken orally or injected, typically in cycles of weeks or months (referred to as “cycling”), rather than continuously. Cycling involves taking multiple doses of steroids over a specific period of time, stopping for a period, and starting again. In addition, users often combine several different types of steroids to maximize their effectiveness while minimizing negative effects (referred to as “stacking”).

Health Hazards

The major side effects from abusing anabolic steroids can include liver tumors and cancer, jaundice (yellowish pigmentation of skin, tissues, and body fluids), fluid retention, high blood pressure, increases in LDL (bad cholesterol), and decreases in HDL (good cholesterol). Other side effects include kidney tumors, severe acne, and trembling. In addition, there are some gender-specific side effects:

- For men — shrinking of the testicles, reduced sperm count, infertility, baldness, development of breasts, increased risk for prostate cancer.
- For women — growth of facial hair, male-pattern

baldness, changes in or cessation of the menstrual cycle, enlargement of the clitoris, deepened voice.

- For adolescents — growth halted prematurely through premature skeletal maturation and accelerated puberty changes. This means that adolescents risk remaining short for the remainder of their lives if they take anabolic steroids before the typical adolescent growth spurt.

In addition, people who inject anabolic steroids run the added risk of contracting or transmitting HIV/AIDS or hepatitis, which causes serious damage to the liver.

Side Effects

Scientific research also shows that aggression and other psychiatric side effects may result from abuse of anabolic steroids. Many users report feeling good about themselves while on anabolic steroids, but researchers report that extreme mood swings also can occur, including manic-like symptoms leading to violence. Depression often is

seen when the drugs are stopped and may contribute to dependence on anabolic steroids. Researchers report also that users may suffer from paranoid jealousy, extreme irritability, delusions, and impaired judgment stemming from feelings of invincibility.