

# Anabolic Steroids

## Patient Education

### What are anabolic steroids?

Anabolic steroids are synthetic substances similar to the male hormone testosterone. Doctors prescribe them to treat problems such as delayed puberty and other medical problems that cause the body to make very low amounts of testosterone. Steroids make muscles bigger and bones stronger. They also may cause puberty to start and can help some boys who have a genetic disorder to grow more normally. Anabolic steroids may be taken as a pill, as a shot into a muscle, or as a gel or cream rubbed on the skin.

Some adults and teens use illegal anabolic steroids to lower body fat, get bigger muscles, and increase strength. They use the drugs because they are seeking to improve how well they play sports or how they look. The dose of illegal anabolic steroids is 10 to 100 times higher than the dose a doctor prescribes for medical problems. People often use more than one of these illegal drugs at the same time. This is called stacking. Or they may take the drugs in a cycle from no drug to a high dose over a period of weeks to months. This is called pyramiding.

Abuse of anabolic steroids differs from the abuse of other illicit substances because the initial use of anabolic steroids is not driven by the immediate euphoria that accompanies most drugs of abuse, such as cocaine, heroin, and marijuana, but by the desire of the abuser to change their appearance and performance, characteristics of great importance to adolescents. These effects of steroids can boost confidence and strength leading the abuser to overlook the potential serious long-term damage that these substances can cause. Research has shown that the inappropriate use of anabolic steroids can have catastrophic medical, psychiatric and behavioral consequences.

### What problems can using illegal anabolic steroids cause?

Anabolic steroids can cause serious side effects. Some of these effects can be permanent.

#### *In men, anabolic steroids can:*

- Reduce sperm count.
- Shrink the testicles.
- Enlarge the breasts.
- Deepen the voice.
- Arrest bone growth in teens

#### *In women, anabolic steroids can:*

- Increase body hair.
- Make skin rough.
- Decrease breast size.
- Enlarge the clitoris.
- Cause you not to be able to father children.

#### *In both men and women, anabolic steroids can cause:*

- Oily skin, acne, and male-pattern hair loss.
- High blood pressure, heart attack, or stroke.
- Skin infections that can become severe if the drug was tainted with bacteria.
- Higher levels of bad cholesterol (LDL) and lower levels of good cholesterol (HDL).
- Irritability, rage, aggression, violence, uncontrolled high energy (mania), false beliefs (delusions), and addiction.
- Liver disease and possibly liver cancer. The chance of these problems is higher when steroids are taken as a pill.

## **Consequences of The Abuse of Anabolic Steroids**

The Congressional hearings on March 17th, 2005 about the reports of anabolic steroid abuse by professional athletes, many of whom are regarded as role models by young people, highlight the fact that we are now facing a very damaging message that is becoming pervasive in our society - that bigger is better, and being the best is more important than how you get there. There is great risk that adolescents will be vulnerable to these messages about anabolic steroids and will be far less concerned about the long-term health risks to their bodies and their minds.

Anabolic steroids are dangerous drugs, and when used inappropriately, they can cause a host of severe, long-lasting, and often irreversible negative health consequences. These drugs can stunt the height of growing adolescents, masculinize women, and alter sex characteristics of men. Anabolic steroids can lead to premature heart attacks, strokes, liver tumors, kidney failure and serious psychiatric problems. In addition, because steroids are often injected, users risk contracting or transmitting HIV or hepatitis.