

WHAT THEY ARE

Steroids are a group of man-made drugs similar to testosterone, the natural hormone that produces male characteristics. Both men and women have testosterone in their bodies, but men have much more of it. Steroids affect the body mainly in two ways: **anabolic** (muscle building) and **androgenic** (enhancing masculine characteristics).

Steroids can be taken in pill form or by injection. Steroids are legal for doctors and veterinarians to prescribe, but for anyone else, selling and buying steroids is illegal. Steroids that are available on the black market are often mixed with other substances, and can be very dangerous.

WHAT THEY DO

Anabolic steroids are widely used by some athletes to try to build muscle so they can run faster, lift more, or jump higher. Also, some men and women use steroids to build up their bodies to look stronger, which may make them feel higher self-esteem and increased confidence.

Using steroids may make you less tired, so you're able to exercise more and longer than normal. Steroids can also promote faster healing when you're injured.

SHORT-TERM EFFECTS

Using steroids can bring on a number of unwanted and disturbing side effects, like acne, high blood pressure, and increased cholesterol levels. They can also lead to impotency, even in young men, and can stunt growth. Steroids can make you irritable and aggressive, a side effect sometimes called "roid rage." They can also increase male characteristics in women, producing facial hair, reducing breast size, deepening the voice, and causing irregular menstruation. People who use steroids often take many times the prescribed dose, which increases the side effects and risks.

Steroids are banned in most sports. Using steroids can cause an athlete to be stripped of awards and banned from future competition.

Research shows that some users go on to use other illegal drugs, to counteract the irritability and restlessness caused by steroids. As with all injected drugs, if you inject steroids you're putting yourself at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis.

LONG-TERM EFFECTS

Using steroids long term can lead to ruptured tendons. Heavy users may also develop liver cancer. And, after taking steroids regularly, a young man's body will no longer produce its own testosterone. It can take from 6 to 12 months after quitting steroid use for the body to start producing its own testosterone again.

ADDICTION

People who use steroids don't develop a tolerance to the drug, but they can become addicted. Withdrawal may give you nausea, headache, dizziness, and cause you to feel depressed and irritable.

BET YOU DIDN'T KNOW

The dietary supplements found in health food stores are often said to contain "natural" steroids. These natural steroids, also called "pro-steroids" are still anabolic steroids and can have the same harmful effects as synthetic steroids can.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- ◇ Why might people put themselves at risk by using steroids, just to build muscle?
- ◇ If an athlete tests positive for steroids 6 months before the Olympics, do you think he or she should be allowed to compete? Why or why not?
- ◇ Health Canada reports that 41% of 15-year-old males and 58% of 15-year-old females want to change the way their bodies look. Why do you think this is?

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