

Dangers of Anabolic Steroid Abuse

What are anabolic steroids? They are compounds or synthetic variants of testosterone, the male sex hormone.

Licensed physicians prescribe these compounds to legally treat such conditions as delayed puberty, diseases resulting in a loss of lean muscle mass (i.e., cancer and AIDS), and other issues resulting from hormone deficiencies.

However, anabolic steroids are also abused and used illegally by bodybuilders and other athletes to enhance both their performance and physical appearance

Why Are Anabolic Steroids Dangerous When Abused?

As noted above, abusers of anabolic steroids are looking for quick fixes, of either their performance or body. To get the effect they are looking for, abusers may use doses that are 10 to 100 times higher than those prescribed to treat medical conditions. In addition, they generally take the drugs on a continuous basis, which can decrease their tolerance for the steroids and cause their body to stop producing its own testosterone. To make matters worse, abusers sometimes combine different steroids and supplements.



Long-term steroid use can affect brain pathways and chemicals, and significantly impact mood and behavior. Anabolic steroid abuse can also lead to psychiatric problems, including aggression, extreme mood swings (manic-like symptoms and anger known as ‘roid rage’ that can lead to violence), paranoid jealousy, extreme irritability, delusions, and impaired judgment stemming from feelings of invincibility.

Other serious, even irreversible, health problems can sometimes result from steroid abuse, including kidney impairment or failure; liver damage; and cardiovascular problems including enlargement of the heart, high blood pressure, and changes in blood cholesterol leading to an increased risk of stroke and heart attack (even in young people). In addition, people who inject steroids run the added risk of contracting or transmitting HIV/AIDS or hepatitis.

Severe acne and fluid retention are also by-products of steroid abuse, as well as the following:

- Men can experience: testicle shrinkage, reduced sperm count or infertility, baldness, breast development, and increased risk for prostate cancer

- **Woman can experience:** facial hair growth, male-pattern baldness, changes in or cessation of the menstrual cycle, enlargement of the clitoris, and deepened voice
- **Adolescents can experience:** stunted growth due to premature skeletal maturation and accelerated puberty changes, and risk of not reaching expected height if steroid use precedes the typical adolescent growth spurt



Are Steroids Addictive?

Yes. Anabolic steroid abuse can lead to addiction. Many individuals continue abusing these drugs even though they are experiencing physical and emotional problems and negative effects on social relationships. Also, as with other addictions, steroid abusers spend large amounts of time and money obtaining the drug.

Anabolic steroid abusers experience withdrawal symptoms if they stop taking these drugs. Symptoms can include mood swings, fatigue, restlessness, loss of appetite, insomnia, reduced sex drive, and steroid cravings. The most dangerous steroid withdrawal symptom is depression, which can lead to suicide. In addition, some abusers turn to other drugs to counteract the negative effects of steroids.

Learn More

For more information on anabolic steroids, visit

<http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/research-reports/anabolic-steroid-abuse>

