

Anabolic Steroids



What Are They?

Ever wondered how those bulky weight lifters got so big? While some may have gotten their muscles through a strict regimen of weightlifting and diet, others may have gotten that way through the illegal use of anabolic-androgenic steroids. "Anabolic" refers to a steroid's ability to help build muscle, and "androgenic" refers to their role in promoting the development of male sexual characteristics. Other types of steroids, like cortisol, estrogen, and progesterone, do not build muscle, are not anabolic, and therefore do not have the same harmful effects.

Anabolic-androgenic steroids are usually synthetic substances similar to the male sex hormone testosterone. They do have legitimate medical uses. Sometimes doctors prescribe them to help people with certain kinds of anemia and men who don't produce enough testosterone on their own. But doctors never prescribe anabolic steroids to young, healthy people to help them build muscles. Without a prescription from a doctor, anabolic steroids are illegal.

There are many different anabolic-androgenic steroids. Here's a list of some of the most common ones taken today: Andro, oxandrin, dianabol, winstrol, deca-durabolin, and equipoise.

What Are the Common Street Names?

Slang words for steroids are hard to find. Most people just say steroids. On the street, steroids may be called "roids" or "juice." The scientific name for this class of drugs is anabolic-androgenic steroids. But even scientists shorten it to anabolic steroids.

How Are They Used?

Some people who abuse steroids pop pills. Others use hypodermic needles to inject steroids directly into muscles. When people take drugs without regard for their legality or their adverse health effects, they are abusing steroids. People who abuse steroids have been known to take doses 10 to 100 times higher than the amount prescribed by a doctor for medical reasons.

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What Is the Scope of Steroid Abuse?

Most teens are smart and stay away from steroids. As part of a 2010 NIDA-funded study, teens were asked if they ever tried steroids—even once. Only 1.1 percent of 8th graders, 1.6 percent of 10th graders, and 2.0 percent of 12th graders ever tried steroids. Abuse is well known to occur in a number of professional sports, including bodybuilding and baseball.

What Are the Effects?

A major health consequence from abusing anabolic steroids can include prematurely stunted growth through early skeletal maturation and accelerated puberty changes. This means that teens risk remaining short for the remainder of their lives if they take anabolic steroids before they stop growing. Other effects include jaundice (yellowish coloring of skin, tissues, and body fluids), fluid retention, high blood pressure, increases in LDL (bad cholesterol), decreases in HDL (good cholesterol), severe acne, trembling, and in very rare cases liver and kidney tumors. In addition, there are some gender-specific side effects:

For guys—shrinking of the testicles, reduced sperm count, infertility, baldness, development of breasts, and increased risk for prostate cancer

For girls—growth of facial hair, male-pattern baldness, changes in or cessation of the menstrual cycle, enlargement of the clitoris, and a permanently deepened voice

Steroid abuse can also have an effect on behavior. 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. This is because anabolic steroids act in a part of the brain called the limbic system, which influences mood and is also involved in learning and memory. Steroids can also lead to other changes in mood, such as feelings of depression or irritability. Depression, which can be life threatening, often is seen when the drugs are stopped and may contribute to the continued use of anabolic steroids. Researchers also report that users may suffer from paranoia, jealousy, extreme irritability, delusions, and impaired judgment stemming from feelings of invincibility.



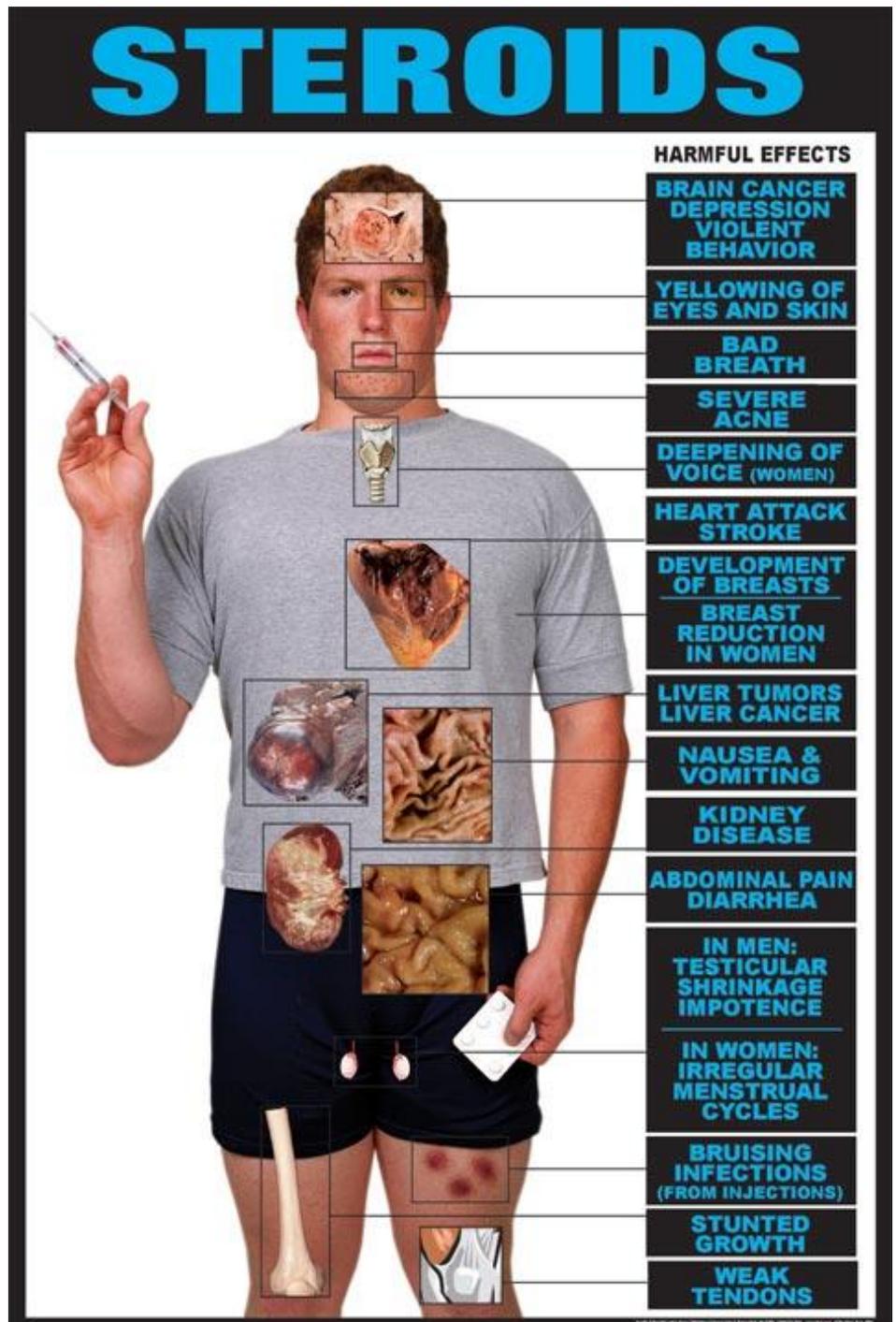
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Can Steroid Abuse Be Fatal?

In some rare cases, yes. When steroids enter the body, they go to different organs and muscles. Steroids are not friendly to the heart. In rare cases, steroid abuse can create a situation where the body may be susceptible to heart attacks and strokes, which can be fatal. Here's how: Steroid use can lead to a condition called atherosclerosis, which causes fat deposits inside arteries to disrupt blood flow. When blood flow to the heart is blocked, a heart attack can occur. If blood flow to the brain is blocked, a stroke can result.

Bulking up the artificial way—by using steroids—puts teens at risk for more than cardiovascular disease. Steroids can weaken the immune system, which is what helps the body fight against germs and disease. That means that illnesses and diseases have an easy target in someone who is abusing steroids.

In addition, people who inject anabolic steroids may share non-sterile "works," or drug injection equipment, that can spread life-threatening viral infections such as HIV/AIDS or hepatitis, which causes serious damage to the liver.



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Are Anabolic Steroids Addictive?

It is possible that some people who abuse steroids may become addicted to the drugs, as evidenced by their continued use in spite of physical problems and negative effects on social relationships. Also, they spend large amounts of time and money obtaining the drugs and, when they stop using them, they experience withdrawal symptoms such as depression, mood swings, fatigue, restlessness, loss of appetite, insomnia, reduced sex drive, and the desire to take more steroids. The most dangerous of the withdrawal symptoms is depression, because it sometimes leads to suicide attempts. Untreated, some depressive symptoms associated with anabolic steroid withdrawal have been known to persist for a year or more after the person stops taking the drugs.

What Can Be Done To Prevent Steroid Abuse?

Research has shown that there is an effective program for preventing steroid abuse among players on high school sports teams. In the ATLAS (for guys) and ATHENA (for girls) programs, coaches and sports team leaders discuss the potential effects of anabolic steroids and other illicit drugs on immediate sports performance, and they teach how to refuse offers of drugs. They also discuss how strength training and proper nutrition can help adolescents build their bodies without the use of steroids. Later, special trainers teach the players proper weightlifting techniques. An ongoing series of studies has shown that this multi-component, team-centered approach reduces new steroid abuse by 50 percent and, at the same time, produces the kind of athletic performance that the teen desires.

What Is the Bottom Line?

The bottom line is: Science proves that there are serious risks associated with the abuse of steroids, and teens should never use anabolic steroids to help them bulk up.

For additional information, please visit: <http://teens.drugabuse.gov>

