

PERFORMANCE ENHANCERS FACTS AND BOTTOM LINE

ANABOLIC STEROIDS

What are they?

There are two types of steroids - corticosteroids and anabolic steroids. Corticosteroids include drugs such as prednisone, cortisone, dexamethasone and celestone and are useful because of their strong anti-inflammatory properties. Corticosteroids are prescribed by physicians for the treatment of many medical problems. Anabolic steroids include drugs such as Stanozolol, Danazol, Nandrolone and Androl. They are synthetic substances that are structurally very similar to the male sex hormone - testosterone. Unlike the corticosteroids, anabolic steroids have very few legitimate medical uses.

WHO MAKES ANABOLIC STEROIDS?

There are over 40 brand name anabolic steroids on the market and an indeterminable number of products that are available through underground laboratories. There is nothing guaranteeing the quality of the anabolic steroids sold on the black market and they often contain potentially harmful contaminants. The RCMP have broken up operations where the substances that were being sold as anabolic steroids were being mixed in a bathtub and contained nothing more than car wax and some urine for color.

WHO USES ANABOLIC STEROIDS?

It is estimated that over a million North Americans are currently using anabolic steroids and many of these users are teenagers. Fifty percent of these people use anabolic steroids hoping to improve their physical performance and the other half do so hoping to improve their physical appearance. People employed in occupations where physical fitness and size are important to success are more likely to resort to using anabolic steroids. These occupations would include professional athletes, police officers, fire fighters, bouncers and soldiers. The steroid users who are seeking to improve their physical appearance are often convinced that "looking big is better" - a phenomenon that some refer to as "Reverse Anorexia".

DO ANABOLIC STEROIDS WORK?

The scientific community was slow admitting it but the truth is that anabolic steroids really do work. They can help improve athletic performance by reducing fatigue, increasing muscle production, enhancing aggressiveness, increasing nitrogen retention, improving calcium levels in bone and elevating hemoglobin levels. To be effective they must be taken in combination with a high protein diet and an intense resistance training program. While anabolic steroids do work, they are considered dangerous substances because of their potential to cause some very serious side effects.

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HOW ARE ANABOLIC STEROIDS TAKEN?

Anabolic steroids can be taken in one of two ways - orally or by intramuscular injection. Steroid users often chose to inject their anabolic steroids in an effort to avoid some of the side effects that are only associated with taking steroids in pill form. Individuals may also unknowingly be taking anabolic steroids if they are present in one or more of their dietary supplements.

ARE THERE SIDE EFFECTS FROM USING ANABOLIC STEROIDS?

There is a frightening list of potential physical and psychological side effects associated with anabolic steroid use. This list has been compiled from research on people taking relatively low doses of anabolic steroids compared to the extraordinary amounts that some people admit to taking. There are individuals who claim to be simultaneously taking huge doses of as many as 14 different anabolic steroids. No one knows what the long-term consequences of such extraordinary abuse will be. Regrettably we may need to closely follow the enormous health problems that are now being experienced by former East German athletes who were subjected to many years of doping in an effort to find the answers to this question. The following is a brief list of some of the side effects associated with anabolic steroid use:

- o **Male side effects:** men taking anabolic steroids can experience breast enlargement, shrinking of the testicles, impotence, and prostate enlargement and reduced sperm count.
- o **Female side effects:** women taking anabolic steroids can experience increased facial hair, enlargement of the clitoris, reduced breast size, male pattern baldness, irregular periods and deepening of the voice. Unfortunately, these masculinizing effects are permanent.
- o **Common physical side effects:** all steroid users can experience tremor, acne, impaired immune system function, and increased blood pressure, liver tumors, hepatitis, elevated cholesterol levels and premature bony maturation. There is also an increase in the risk of contracted an infectious disease such as AIDS or hepatitis if users are sharing their needles for injections.
- o **Common psychological side effects:** the psychological effects of anabolic steroid use can be very significant and include - aggressiveness, hallucinations, sleep disturbance, antisocial behaviour, paranoia and emotional volatility. Strong feelings of depression often occur when people stop taking these drugs and although physical addiction to anabolic steroids does not occur, people can become psychologically dependent on them. Anabolic steroid users often become obsessed with developing a larger physique.

IS IT DANGEROUS TO BUY ANABOLIC STEROIDS THROUGH THE BLACK MARKET?

Most of the anabolic steroids used in North America are manufactured on the black market by companies or individuals who are more interested in profit than the consumer's personal safety.

Since there is no way of regulating this production, there is no way of knowing what a vial of black market anabolic steroids actually contains. In many instances these

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products contain absolutely no anabolic steroid and may in fact be contaminated with substances that could be very dangerous to the user.

ARE ANABOLIC STEROIDS ILLEGAL?

In Canada, anabolic steroids and their derivatives are considered "Controlled Substances" and as such it is illegal to manufacture, import, export or sell these substances. Canadian Forces members are not exempt from this legislation and this is further reiterated in the Canadian Forces Drug Control Program as outlined in CFAO 19-21. Despite all of the above, using anabolic steroids is not illegal.

ARE THERE CONCERNS FOR ATHLETES?

Yes! Anabolic steroids have been classified as banned substances by the International Olympic Committee and CISM (Conseil International Du Sport Militaire). Athletes who test positive for anabolic steroid use could be given a life-time suspension from competitive sports.

THE BOTTOM LINE!

While anabolic steroids do work to help individuals build muscle, these dangerous substances should be avoided because of their long list of potentially serious side effects.

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