

# Anabolic Steroids—Not Worth the Risk

Bigger, stronger muscles. Improved athletic performance. That is what anabolic steroids promise. But what are steroids? And are these claims true?

Steroids are drugs made from hormones, the chemical messengers of the human body. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has approved the use of selected anabolic steroids for treating specific types of anemia, some breast cancers, osteoporosis (a bone disease), and several other diseases. Anabolic steroids are available legally only by prescription. There is a “black market” in anabolic steroids, however, that is similar to the illegal drug trade.

Although they have benefits when used properly under a doctor’s care, anabolic steroids have been misused. Professional athletes—for example, weight lifters and sprinters—who need quick bursts of muscle power began

to use them to increase their performance. Steroids gained notoriety during athletic competitions such as the Olympic Games. Since the mid-1980s, when a test was developed to detect the presence of steroids in the urine, 17 different steroids have been banned by the Olympic Committee. Olympic athletes are tested for steroids before they are allowed to compete.

There is no real evidence that steroids do enhance athletic performance. Nevertheless, illegal steroid use continues. What’s more, it is not limited to adults. Doctors, parents, and coaches are concerned about a growing trend of illegal steroid use among young people. They are concerned because anabolic steroids are powerful drugs that, when misused, can pose serious health risks.

## How Steroids Work

Anabolic steroids are derived from a hormone called testosterone. “Steroid” refers

to the drug’s chemical structure. “Anabolic” refers to the drug’s effect on the body. Anabolic steroids cause the body to retain nitrogen, which is a key ingredient of amino acids. Amino acids are the building blocks of protein, which helps build muscle and other tissue. Testosterone can stimulate the formation of red blood cells, which enable the body to carry more oxygen.

Anabolic steroids have many harmful side effects. They can cause high blood pressure, infertility, yellowing of the skin, acne, and trembling, as well as emotional effects such as depression. Violent outbursts of anger, sometimes called “roid rage,” can result from steroid use. Women who take steroids may develop facial hair or deepened voices. Their menstrual periods may stop. Men may become bald or develop breasts. Adolescents may



*Anabolic steroids have many negative side effects.*

develop these same side effects. In addition, they may stop growing prematurely.

## Solving the Problem

Most young people are aware of the risks of steroids. A majority of them disapprove of athletes who take these drugs. What do you think teachers, coaches, parents, and doctors can do to get the message out? How would you explain the dangers of using anabolic steroids to one of your friends? What would most convince you never to use steroids? □