



Fitness Facts

What Athletes Should Know About Taking Steroids

(NAPSA)—A recent survey by the National Institute on Drug Abuse found that almost four percent of high school athletes have used anabolic steroids to enhance performance and improve physical appearance—and yet few young athletes may be well informed about the potentially dangerous side effects associated with using steroids.

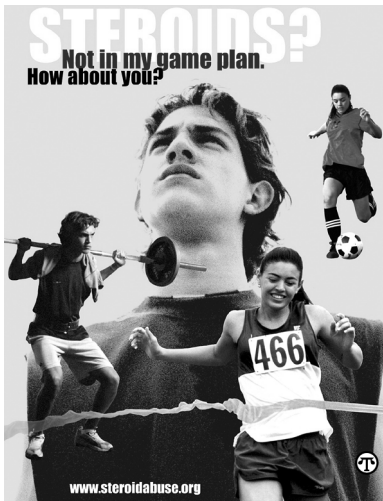
Anabolic-androgenic steroids are man-made substances related to male sex hormones. “Anabolic” refers to muscle-building and “androgenic” refers to increased masculine characteristics.

While there are legitimate medical reasons for prescribing anabolic steroids—such as treating muscle-wasting diseases—many athletes today misuse and abuse steroids for nonmedical reasons, such as building muscle mass.

Misuse and abuse of anabolic steroids can lead to serious health problems, some irreversible. These problems include liver tumors and cancer, jaundice (yellowish pigmentation of skin, tissues and body fluids), fluid retention, high blood pressure, increases in LDL (bad cholesterol) and decreases in HDL (good cholesterol). Other side effects include kidney tumors, severe acne and trembling.

In addition, there are some gender-specific side effects:

- For men—shrinking of the



Many steroid abusers are not aware of the dangerous side effects associated with misusing anabolic steroids.

testicles, reduced sperm count, infertility, baldness, development of breasts, increased risk for prostate cancer.

- For women—growth of facial hair, male-pattern baldness, changes in or cessation of menstrual cycle, enlargement of the clitoris, deepened voice.

- For adolescents—growth halted prematurely through premature skeletal maturation and accelerated puberty changes.

This means that adolescents risk remaining short for the

remainder of their lives if they take anabolic steroids before the typical adolescent growth spurt.

In addition, people who inject anabolic steroids run the added risk of transmitting HIV/AIDS or hepatitis, which causes serious damage to the liver.

Scientific research shows that aggression and other psychiatric side effects may result from abuse of anabolic steroids.

Many users report feeling good about themselves while on anabolic steroids but researchers report that extreme mood swings can also occur, including manic-like symptoms leading to violent behavior.

Depression is often seen when the drugs are stopped and may contribute to dependence on anabolic steroids.

Researchers report that users may suffer from paranoid jealousy, extreme irritability, delusions and impaired judgment stemming from feelings of invincibility.

Research also indicates that some users may turn to other drugs to alleviate some of the negative effects of anabolic steroids.

For more information on steroid abuse, visit www.steroidabuse.gov, a Web site created by the National Institute on Drug Abuse, a component of the National Institutes on Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.