

# Fit Facts™

FROM THE AMERICAN COUNCIL ON EXERCISE®

## THE TRUTH ABOUT STEROIDS

Steroid abuse is still on the rise, and not just among professional athletes and bodybuilders. Despite numerous educational efforts by health-care officials, many amateur and high school athletes looking for that elusive competitive edge still believe they can get it from a syringe or a bottle of pills. What they don't realize is that steroids will give them a lot more than they bargained for.

### **NOT WORTH THE RISK**

Acne. Liver damage. Increased risk of heart disease. These are just a few of the side effects associated with anabolic steroid abuse. And there's more.

The side effects are severe. Men who use steroids also may develop gynecomastia (the development of breasts), priapism (painful prolonged erection) and edema from sodium and water retention. They also will be more prone to cardiovascular problems since steroids decrease high-density lipoprotein levels (HDL) or "good" cholesterol, and increase low-density lipoprotein levels (LDL) or "bad" cholesterol. Coupled with hypertension and negative changes in myocardial tissue, steroid users are at an increased risk for heart attack as well.

Of additional concern are alterations in psyche and behavior (i.e., aggression, physical dependence) and decreased immune function. Changes in the reproductive system, such as a reduction in testicle size, sperm count and mobility, and a decrease in the levels of endogenous testosterone and other sex hormones are common.

### **WOMEN AT RISK**

Unlike men, whose side effects may be reversible once the abuse has stopped, women experience irreversible changes, such as a deepened voice, increased facial and body hair growth, enlarged clitoris and coarser skin. In addition, irregularities in, or cessation of menstrual cycle, increased libido, aggressiveness, acne and decreased immune function may occur. Women are also prone to the cardiovascular risks and changes in psyche and behavior that men experience.



### **ALL RISK, NO GLORY**

There is an even scarier risk of steroid abuse: death. Steroid users who share needles are putting themselves at risk for developing infections such as HIV, hepatitis or other viral diseases.

The terminal risks of steroid abuse are not fully known. Some published cases of tumors and other cancers related to steroid abuse have been reported. Even so, physicians and researchers do not know all the repercussions of steroid abuse on one's body and future health. Controlled research is unethical and only

information from abusers is usable; yet this data may be inaccurate since most users are not forthcoming about the full extent of their steroid use.

Since the late 1980s, the federal government has begun to crack down on steroid use and distribution. Possession of steroids with intent to distribute without a valid prescription is a felony and subject to prosecution. Likewise, steroid use is a violation of the rules of virtually all sports leagues and councils as well as the traditional ethics of good sportsmanship.

### **NO SUBSTITUTE FOR TRAINING**

What most steroid users don't realize is that they are placing themselves at risk for something they could achieve on their own. Many experts agree that the effects of steroids on strength and muscle mass of beginning weight lifters or athletes are minimal when compared with the effects of an intensive weight-training or conditioning program.

The best way to improve performance and increase muscle mass is to follow a well-designed program that challenges both your body and your mind. No drug can do that for you.

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