
NIDA for Teens: Facts on Drugs

What Are They?



Ever wondered how those bulky weight lifters got so big? While some may have gotten their muscles through a strict re-

gimen 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.

What Is the Scope of Steroid Abuse?

Most teens are smart and stay away from steroids. As part of a 2011 NIDA-funded study, teens were asked if they ever tried steroids—even once. Only 1.2 percent of 8th graders, 1.4 percent of 10th graders, and 1.8 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

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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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