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Steroids

Overview

Anabolic steroids were developed in the late 1930s primarily to treat hypogonadism, a condition in which the testes do not produce sufficient testosterone for normal growth, development, and sexual functioning. The primary medical uses of these compounds are to treat delayed puberty, some types of impotence, and wasting of the body caused by HIV infection or other diseases.

During the 1930s, scientists discovered that anabolic steroids could facilitate the growth of skeletal muscle in laboratory animals. This led to abuse of these compounds by bodybuilders and weightlifters and then by athletes in other sports.¹

Anabolic steroids can be taken orally, injected intramuscularly, or rubbed on the skin when in the form of gels or creams.² These drugs are often used in patterns called cycling, which involves taking multiple doses of steroids over a specific period of time, stopping for a period, and starting again. Users also frequently combine several different types of steroids in a process known as stacking.³ By doing this, users believe that the different steroids will interact to produce an effect on muscle size that is greater than the effects of using each drug individually.⁴

Another mode of steroid use is "pyramiding." This is a process in which users slowly escalate steroid use (increasing the number of drugs used at one time and/or the dose and frequency of one or more steroids) reaching a peak amount at mid-cycle and gradually tapering the dose toward the end of the cycle.⁵

Extent of Use (National Statistics)

Results from the 2007 Monitoring the Future Study, which surveys students in eighth, tenth, and twelfth grades, show that 1.5% of eighth graders, 1.8% of tenth graders, and 2.2% of twelfth graders reported using steroids at least once in their lifetimes.⁶

Percent of Students Reporting Steroid Drug Use, 2006-2007

	8th Grade		10th Grade		12th Grade	
		2007	2006	2007	2006	2007
Past month	0.5%	0.4%	0.6%	0.5%	1.1%	1.0
Past year	0.9	0.8	1.2	1.1	1.8	1.4
Lifetime	1.6	1.5	1.8	1.8	2.7	2.2

Regarding the ease by which one can obtain steroids, 17.0% of eighth graders, 27.7% of tenth graders, and 40.1% of twelfth graders surveyed in 2006 reported that steroids were "fairly easy" or "very easy" to obtain. Furthermore, 57.4% of twelfth graders surveyed reported that using steroids was a "great risk" during 2007.⁷

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) also conducts a survey of high school students throughout the United States, the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS). Nearly 5% of all high school students surveyed by CDC in 2005 reported lifetime use of steroid pills/shots without a doctor's prescription.⁸

Percent of Students Reporting Lifetime Steroid Use, 2001–2005

	2001	2003	2005
9th grade	5.8%	7.1%	4.8%
10th grade	4.9	6.1	3.9
11th grade	4.3	5.6	3.7
12th grade	4.3	4.9	3.3
Total	5.0	6.1	4.0

Approximately 1.8% of young adults (ages 19–28) surveyed in 2006 reported lifetime use of steroids.⁹

Percent of Young Adults Reporting Steroid Use, 2005–2006

	2005	2006
Past month	0.1%	0.1%
Past year	0.5	0.3
Lifetime	1.8	1.8

Health Effects

Anabolic steroid abuse has been associated with a wide range of adverse side effects ranging from some that are physically unattractive, such as acne and breast development in men, to others that are life threatening. Most of the effects are reversible if the abuser stops taking the drug, but some can be permanent. In addition to the physical effects, anabolic steroids can also cause increased irritability and aggression.¹⁰

Some of the health consequences that can occur in both males and females include liver cancer, heart attacks, and elevated cholesterol levels.¹¹ In addition to this, steroid use among adolescents may prematurely stop the lengthening of bones resulting in stunted growth.¹²

People who inject steroids also run the risk of contracting or transmitting hepatitis or HIV.¹³ Some steroid abusers experience withdrawal symptoms when they stop taking the drug. These withdrawal symptoms include mood swings, fatigue, restlessness, loss of appetite, insomnia, reduced sex drive, and depression. This depression can lead to suicide attempts, and if left untreated, can persist for a year or more after the abuser stops taking the drugs.¹⁴

Production & Trafficking

Illicit anabolic steroids are often sold at gyms, competitions, and through mail operations after being smuggled into this country.¹⁵ The most common sources for obtaining steroids for illegal use are Internet purchases and smuggling them into the U.S. from other countries such as Mexico and European countries. These countries do not require a prescription for the purchase of steroids, making it easier to smuggle them.¹⁶ In addition to this, steroids are also illegally diverted from U.S. pharmacies or synthesized in clandestine laboratories.¹⁷

Legislation

Concerns over a growing illicit market and prevalence of abuse combined with the possibility of harmful long-term effects of steroid use led Congress to place anabolic steroids into Schedule III of the Controlled Substances Act (CSA) in 1991.¹⁸ It is therefore illegal to possess or sell anabolic steroids without a valid prescription. Some States have also implemented additional fines and penalties for illegal use of anabolic steroids.¹⁹

The International Olympic Committee, National Collegiate Athletic Association and many professional sports leagues (including the Major League Baseball, National Basketball Association, National Football League, and National Hockey League), have banned the use of steroids by athletes due to their potentially dangerous side effects and because they give the user an unfair advantage.²⁰

Street Terms²¹

Street/Slang Terms for Steroids
Arnolds
Gym Candy
Juice
Pumpers
Stackers
Weight Trainers

Other Links

[Anabolic Steroids: Hidden Dangers](#)

This fact sheet provides information on the dangerous medical health effects of illegal steroid use and how to help a friend if they are abusing steroids.

[Athletes Training & Learning to Avoid Steroids \(ATLAS\)](#)

ATLAS is designed to teach male athletes how to improve their performance and strength through proper nutrition and training rather than with drugs.

[Coach's Playbook Against Drugs](#)

This document is designed to help coaches keep their teams drug free.

[Squeezing Out the Juice: Tackling the Steroid Issue](#)

View this hour-long Webcast to learn about the health effects of steroids and hear how the pressure to win influences choices people make. See what the DEA, legislators, sports leagues, and schools are doing about performance-enhancing drugs.

[SteroidAbuse.Gov](#)

This NIDA site provides information about steroids.

[Steroid Abuse in Today's Society](#)

This guide will help you understand why steroids are being abused, and how you can educate athletes and others about the dangers of these drugs.

[Steroids and Young People](#)

This fact sheet provides an overview of recent data related to steroid use among youth.

[Tips for Teens: The Truth About Steroids](#)

This brochure provides teens with information about the dangers of steroid abuse.

[Winning at Any Cost: Doping in Olympic Sports](#) (PDF)

This report recommends a series of steps to eliminate doping in the Olympics.

[World Anti-Doping Agency \(WADA\)](#)

The mission of WADA is to promote and coordinate at international level the fight against doping in sport in all forms.

Sources

- ¹ National Institute on Drug Abuse, [Research Report: Anabolic Steroid Abuse](#), September 2006
- ² Ibid.
- ³ National Institute on Drug Abuse, [Infobox: Steroids \(Anabolic-Androgenic\)](#), March 2005
- ⁴ National Institute on Drug Abuse, [Research Report: Anabolic Steroid Abuse](#), September 2006
- ⁵ Drug Enforcement Administration, [Drugs of Abuse](#), 2005 Edition
- ⁶ National Institute on Drug Abuse and University of Michigan, [2007 Monitoring the Future Study Drug Data Tables](#), December 2007
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—United States, 2005](#), June 2006
- ⁹ National Institute on Drug Abuse, [Monitoring the Future National Survey Results on Drug Use, 1975–2005, Volume II: College Students & Adults Ages 19–45 \(PDF\)](#), 2006
- ¹⁰ National Institute on Drug Abuse, [Research Report: Anabolic Steroid Abuse](#), September 2006
- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² Drug Enforcement Administration, [Drugs of Abuse](#), 2005 Edition
- ¹³ National Institute on Drug Abuse, [Infobox: Steroids \(Anabolic-Androgenic\)](#), March 2005
- ¹⁴ National Institute on Drug Abuse, [Research Report: Anabolic Steroid Abuse](#), September 2006
- ¹⁵ Drug Enforcement Administration, [Steroids Factsheet](#)
- ¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁷ National Institute on Drug Abuse, [Research Report: Anabolic Steroid Abuse](#), September 2006
- ¹⁸ Drug Enforcement Administration, [Drugs of Abuse](#), 2005 Edition
- ¹⁹ Drug Enforcement Administration, [Steroid Abuse by School Age Children: A Guide for Parents and School Officials \(PDF\)](#), March 2004
- ²⁰ Ibid.
- ²¹ Office of National Drug Control Policy, Drug Policy Information Clearinghouse, [Street Terms: Drugs and the Drug Trade](#)