



STERIODS: ANABOLIC OR DIABOLIC?

Riddle: What can make a guy think he's strong as Popeye but at the same time shrink his testicles?

Answer: Anabolic steroids.

First synthesized in 1935, anabolic steroids are chemical compounds that act like the male hormone, testosterone. The word anabolic is defined as "tissue producing." Steroids have been used medically because they aid in muscle growth and tissue repair. Therefore they are used for malnutrition, anemia, testosterone deficiency, dwarfism, recovery from surgery, and to counteract the negative effects of chemotherapy.

The most prominent used of steroids, however, are not medical. Instead they are illegally used for the development of muscles by male and female athletes and by men who otherwise feel inadequate about their bodily appearance. Among the leading steroids are Dianabol, Anadrol, Winstrol, Anavar, Deca-Durabolic, and Growth Hormone. Some of these drugs are injected and others are taken orally. Users of these drugs may switch from one drug to another regularly and employ very high doses. One steroid, Equipoise, is regularly used to build muscles in show horses but is used in humans at a rate of ten times what a horse would normally get.

Steroid use has been referred to as a "narcissistic disease" because of the self-centered motives of steroid users. However, the paradox is that when one considers all of the possible negative aspects of steroid use, there is a real question of whether users are actually doing themselves a favor. Here are some factors that should be considered by anyone who is using or considering the use of anabolic steroids.

- Steroids are banned by the NCAA and the International Olympic Committee and may not be prescribed, according to Florida law, for muscle use, but only for medical reasons. The drugs have unknown long-term effects. Each person can be expected to react differently, as with any drug.
- Reported effects in women are deeper voice, shrunken breasts, growth of facial hair, menstrual irregularity.
- In men, steroid use can cause premature baldness, decreased testicle size, a lower sperm count, impotence, and infertility.

- Other common physical effects are acne, early heart disease, liver tumors, high blood pressure, increased cholesterol levels, and development of bleeding ulcers.
- Steroids can be psychologically and physically addicting with depression and a loss of sense of power resulting when the drug is discontinued.

A common phenomenon during a heavy cycle of use is "roid rage" in which the steroid user becomes extremely aggressive and often belligerent. Women who are dating men in the midst of a heavy cycle of use may be very vulnerable to rape as steroid users report uncontrollable sexual aggressiveness and impulsiveness.

Another complication is that heavy steroid users often need other drugs to control the effects of steroids. For example, wrestlers may need to take diuretics to reduce water buildup to get down to their appropriate wrestling weight. Also, other medications are used to control fast heartbeat in steroid users.

Interestingly, scientific researchers question whether steroids really increase strength or muscle bulk at all and instead believe they simply cause water and salt retention and the false appearance of increased muscle mass. In fact, muscles and body size usually can be expected to deflate when steroids are stopped.