



## | Anabolic Steroids 101 – Beginner's Guide To Muscle Building Drugs

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BY MEGAN JOHNSON MCCULLOUGH

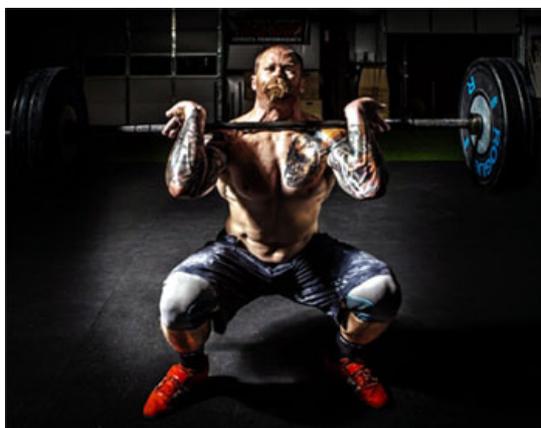
BODYBUILDING

As part of society's popular desire to get incredible results as soon as possible, therein lies the use of anabolic steroids into our society. Now, as a professional natural bodybuilder, I have my strong beliefs, but will write with neutrality and an open-mind about this topic. Hence, I love a good challenge!

### **What Exactly are Anabolic Steroids?**

Defining these substances is a good starting point. "Anabolic steroids are synthetic variations of the male sex hormone testosterone. The proper term for these compounds is anabolic-androgenic steroids. "Anabolic" refers to muscle building, and "androgenic" refers to increased male sex characteristics. Some common names for anabolic steroids are Gear, Juice, Roids, and Stackers" ([reference](#)). It is extremely important to not confuse this type of drug with corticosteroids. Corticosteroids or glucocorticoids, are drugs closely related to cortisol, a hormone which is naturally produced in the adrenal cortex (the outer layer of the adrenal gland). Anabolic means to build up while catabolic means to breakdown. Corticosteroids help to reduce swelling and inflammation. Anabolic steroids help to build muscle mass and increase strength levels. Although I have never used corticosteroids, I can remember my grandfather being pumped with steroids or elderly clients being treated with them for asthma, to boost immunity, or for other stressors and ailments that have been placed on the body.

This leads us to the important fact that without a doctor's prescription, steroids are illegal. I actually wasn't aware of the consequences: "Legal prosecution can be a serious side effect of illicit steroid use. Under federal law, first-time simple possession of anabolic steroids carries a maximum penalty of one year in prison and a \$1,000 fine. For first-offense trafficking in steroids, the maximum penalty is five years in prison and a fine of \$250,000. Second offenses double this penalty. In addition to federal penalties, state laws also prohibit illegal anabolic steroid use" ([reference](#)).



Appearance is a human nature that's a priority for many of us. Who wouldn't want to increase muscle and decrease body fat? The generalization is that males want muscle and women want to lose fat. It's the ideal recipe for a bodybuilder. Athletes use them too for performance enhancement. Being able to increase strength and speed is a goal for most professional athletes. It's a black market that is rarely spoken about. The type used and how it is taken can reduce the risk of being caught.

### **How are Anabolic Steroids Used?**

Anabolic steroids can be applied with creams, taken in pill form, but they are most commonly injected directly into the muscle (intramuscular injection) using the large gluteal muscle (butt), the quadricep (front of leg) or deltoid (shoulder). When it comes to bodybuilding, it's a science of taking certain "drug cocktails" to maximize overall gains in size, strength and fat loss. "Cycling, stacking, and pyramiding are three common ways that anabolic steroid users take their drugs. Cycling refers to taking a steroid for a specific period of time (usually 10-12 weeks), stopping for the body to rest (usually 10-12 weeks), and then restarting again. If more than one type of steroid is used at a time, this is called stacking. There is the belief that using two or more steroids at a time increases the effectiveness of each one and this is called the "synergistic effect" of using the drugs. Pyramiding combines the cycling and stacking. One or more steroids are started with a low dose and the dose gradually increases until halfway through the cycle where the amount is maximized and it is then tapered to zero by the end of the cycle" ([reference](#)). The body is undergoing a lot of stress during this process, but for those who use anabolic steroids, the benefits outweigh this. After a cycle of 10-12 weeks, the person usually gets off the anabolic steroids and uses a "PCT" (Post Cycle Therapy) regimen which consists of taking certain drugs (HCG, Clomid, Nolvadex) in order to kickstart their own endogenous production of testosterone while minimizing the negative side effects of increased estrogen which usually occurs when getting off a cycle.



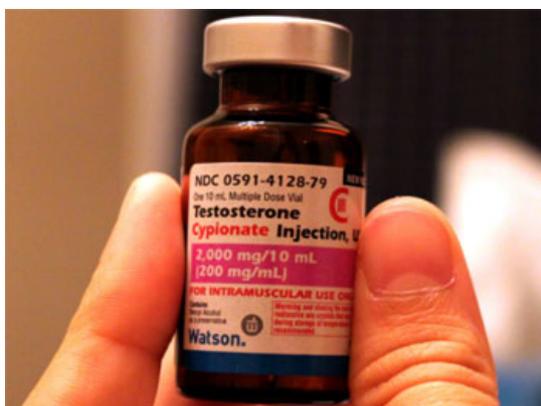
### **What are The Side Effects of Anabolic Steroid Use?**

The risks and side effects vary among users, but are experienced to some extent by many people who take larger doses of anabolic steroids. Having more than normal levels of hormones, especially in extreme amounts in a male body can "lead to shrunken testicles and decreased sperm count, baldness, and breast development (gynecomastia)" ([reference](#)). Having attended various bodybuilding competitions as a spectator at the non-tested shows, the competitors seem to have a large

amount of acne also. This would be from a hormonal imbalance or when taking certain substances that are prone to this side effect. Females who take on a more male physique with increased muscle mass tend to get a very sharp, protruding chin. These women's backs and shoulders get very broad, their breast size reduces, their voice becomes deep like a man, and there is an increase in hair on the body. None of these side effects are desirable and both males and females are at an increased risk for stroke, heart attack, and severe liver damage. Mood swings are also very common.

### **How Much Do Anabolic Steroids Cost?**

If you purchase them on the black market (versus getting them with a prescription through an anti-aging clinic), the cost is around \$75-100 per 10 ML for a bottle of testosterone. The normal dose of testosterone is 200 MG per ML, so a 10 ML bottle will consist of 2,000 MLs. There are many other popular types of steroids that usually cost more than the base testosterone drug and these include Deca Durabolin, Trenbolone, Primobolan, Anavar, Dianabol, Anadrol and veterinary steroids like Equipoise and Winstrol. The price for these can range from \$150-300 per bottle and even more. The normal dose for bodybuilders starts at about 250 to 500 MG per week of testosterone as a base and then other drugs are usually stacked on top of this when running a cycle of steroids. Extreme bodybuilders will use anywhere from 1,000 to 3,000 MG per week for supraphysiologic doses to gain the most muscle mass and strength. Serious side effects can occur with this extreme doses.



### **Anabolic Steroids in Sports**

Some professional athletes have had their careers tarnished from steroid use. Recently, the Russians have undergone scrutiny and were at one point banned from Olympic participation. High profile athletes like Barry Bonds, Alex Rodriguez, Marion Jones, and Roger Clemens were caught as users. Performance enhancing drugs question the athletic integrity and completely defies the fair playing field for all athletes. The winners aren't truly winning the right way. There's an unfair advantage. Probably most famously, Lance Armstrong fooled the world with his cycling career. He was a false champion who went so far as having blood transfusions to hide his doping. He tested "clean" over 50 times. What was once thought of as remarkable athletic ability was completely diminished when the truth came to light.

It's interesting that when looking up statistics concerning steroid use among our population, most steer towards teen usage. This isn't a widely discussed topic, so adult use was difficult to find. Seems like it would be a hormonal mess for teens to use steroids, but as early as 8th grade, this is occurring. Some high school athletes with the competitive edge who want to play at the next level, turn to steroids to make this happen.

At my latest natural competition, a fellow competitor mentioned that even if other organizations and bodybuilders do use substances, they still have to put time in at the gym. This made me think. The muscles don't just magically appear and of course Lance Armstrong still underwent vigorous training, but the end result was that there is still an unfair advantage. Steroids would allow them to train harder and longer with more volume, leading to more improvements in a shorter amount of time. If the playing field were even, and everyone either was or wasn't using, then the judgement zone becomes equal. Then we can see who worked harder and pushed through longer to be in the current state. I have also heard of people getting hurt during exercise from steroid use because of their false sense of strength. Tears can occur lifting such heavy weights because you think you are capable, but your body isn't meant to do that since the muscles grow extremely fast while tendons lag

behind which leads to muscle tears and injury. Looking and feeling like Hercules doesn't mean that you are Hercules.



Being in the fitness industry, I have experienced the pressures of trying performing enhancing substances, being part of someone's new product, or helping a brand by promoting an item. Exposure is always nice, but most times I just politely decline. Fitness expos and conventions are marked by all sorts of products to get more muscle mass, and to become quicker, faster, stronger, and leaner. It's a growing marketplace and then celebrities become the faces of these products through endorsements. An athlete can be sponsored by these products as well. Because your favorite athlete takes a product means that it actually works and is a great one to buy, right?

### **Anabolic Steroids and Addiction**

It is not uncommon to become psychologically addicted to steroids. The results are appealing and the user doesn't want to lose the body that they have developed. The liver and other organs can only take so much. Addiction recovery help is available because users do experience withdrawal from the dependency they have developed. Our bodies are resilient and can come back from many years of damage, but that doesn't mean your mind and personal self-worth will be the same when you lose 30-50 pounds of muscle and change back into a mere mortal when you get off all the drugs.

Having a certain body image is desirable and when it can be done in a short period of time, it seems like a novel idea. But that is living in the here and now. Our hormones are sensitive and playing with them can damage them for the long haul, which means many of our bodily functions and processes are at risk for proper functioning. Taking the body through such extreme measures puts unnecessary stress on the body that is making one's systems fight a good fight every single day.

I respect all athletes, and do try to be neutral when it comes to this subject. It would be difficult to be a competitor against someone like Marion Jones or Lance Armstrong and wonder if the odds were really fair. That "what if " would be daunting. Many people believe that if you can't beat them, you should join them. But then where's the integrity in sports? Is it just all about making the most money and winning competitions with an "anything to win" attitude? Not all organizations do testing. Many make threats and have participants sign that random testing will take place, but the likelihood of following through with this is slim to none because of the expenses. Other organizations include the drug testing in their fees to participate. This levels the playing field.

I want to live in a world where 1st place actually means 1st place. Not 1st place but he/she was caught using anabolic steroids after the fact. The underground nature of all of this is quite scary. It's the basics: diet, exercise, and practice, practice, practice that make competition legitimate. Hard work can beat talent, but true hard work may not beat steroids. Honestly and integrity will always be priorities to me!

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#### ABOUT AUTHOR



MEGAN JOHNSON MCCULLOUGH

My name is Megan Johnson McCullough and I have a Master's degree in Physical Education and Health Science. My motto is that every BODY deserves to become the best versions of themselves. I have been a trainer for 12 years and have accumulated many certifications, but most proudly becoming an elite NASM Master Trainer. I am also a professional natural bodybuilder and member of Team USA. See my **profile page** for more information!

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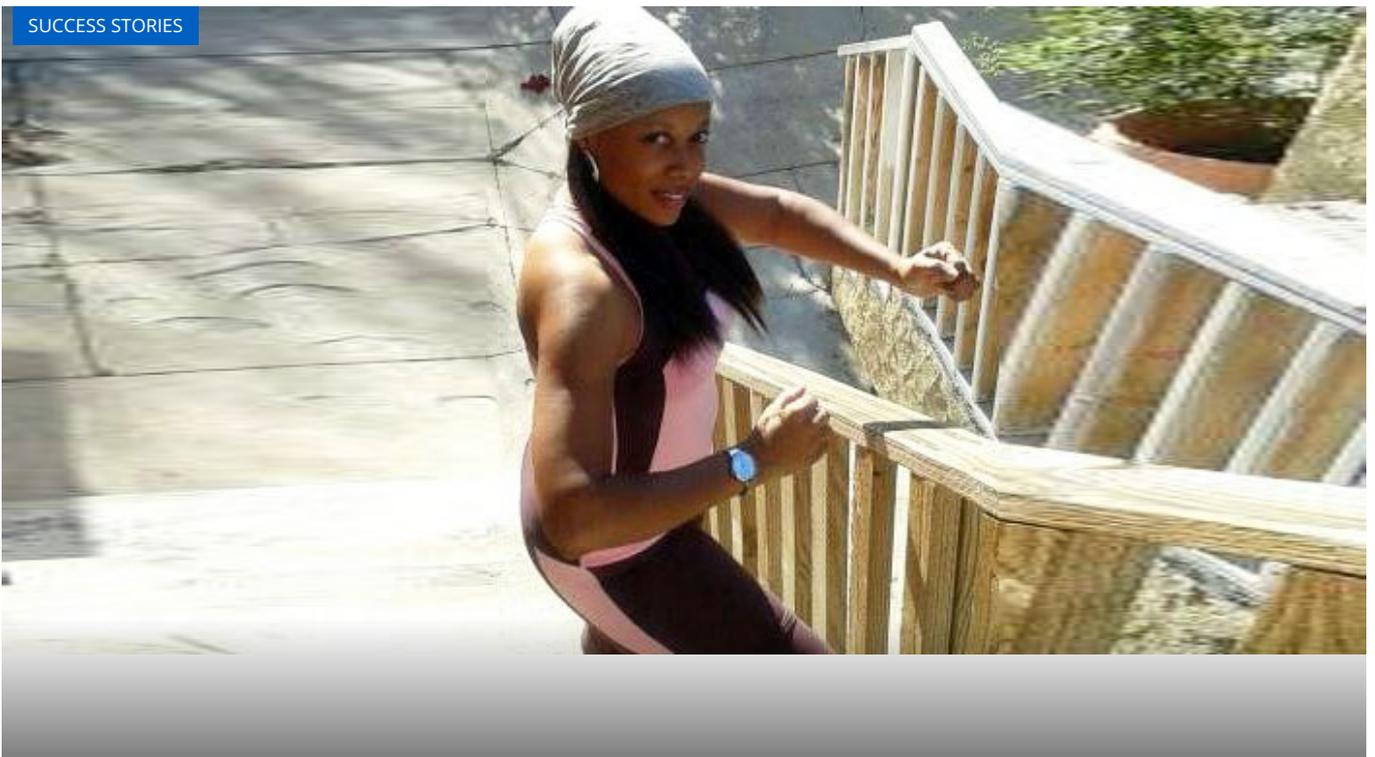
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