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Steroids (Anabolic)

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Anabolic steroids are a synthetic variation of the male sex hormone. They can be legally prescribed to treat conditions resulting from steroid hormone deficiency, such as delayed puberty, as well as diseases that result in loss of lean muscle mass, such as cancer and AIDS. However, some athletes, bodybuilders, and others abuse steroid drugs in an attempt to enhance performance and/or improve their physical appearance.

How Are Anabolic Steroids Abused?

Typically an anabolic steroid will be taken orally or injected into the muscles. However some are applied to the skin as a cream or gel. When abused the drug is taken in doses that are often 10 to 100 times higher than doses prescribed to treat medical conditions.

There are many adverse side effects associated with steroid use, this is why it is taken intermittently in attempts to avoid any unwanted changes in the body's hormonal system. Regular use of steroids can cause the individual to develop a tolerance, it can also cause the body to stop producing its own natural testosterone. Many will stop the use of the drug when this happens, restarting it after a period of time, this is known as "cycling".

Some users will take part in the practice known as "stacking" where they combine different types of steroids or other non-steroidal supplements to maximize the effectiveness of the drug.

How Do Anabolic Steroids Affect the Brain?

The way that anabolic steroids work is much different than the way other commonly abused drugs do. There is a different effect on the brain by increasing the individual's testosterone levels. It can affect some parts of the brain pathways and chemicals including, dopamine, serotonin and opioid systems. These systems are affected by the drug and create a significant impact on the individual's mood and behavior.

Many individuals who abuse anabolic steroids may develop aggressive behaviors and other psychiatric problems. They may experience extreme mood swings; manic-like symptoms and anger known as "roid rage", this can lead to the individual becoming violent. Many chronic anabolic steroid abusers suffer from paranoid jealousy, extreme irritability, delusions, and impaired judgment stemming from feelings of invincibility.

Are Steroids Addictive?

Anabolic steroids can be habit forming, leading to addiction. Many people continue abusing steroids despite physical problems and negative effects on social relationships, reflecting these drugs' addictive potential. Many abusers will spend large amounts of time and money obtaining the drug.

When an individual is dependent on steroids and abruptly stops its use they will experience withdrawal symptoms

... withdrawal symptoms such as depression, fatigue, loss of appetite, sleeplessness, and experience withdrawal symptoms including mood swings, fatigue, restlessness, loss of appetite, insomnia, reduced sex drive, and steroid cravings, all of which may contribute to continued abuse. There is a high risk suicide in those withdrawing from steroids as a dangerous symptoms is depression that can trigger these suicidal behaviors.

What Are the Other Health Effects of Anabolic Steroids?

The abuse of steroids can lead to serious health problems, some which are irreversible. Steroid abuse can cause kidney impairment or failure, damage to the liver and cardiovascular system including enlargement of the heart, high blood pressure, and changes in blood cholesterol leading to an increased risk of stroke and heart attack (even in young people).

Steroid use commonly causes severe acne and fluid retention. Men may experience shrinkage of the testicles (testicular atrophy), reduced sperm count or infertility, baldness, development of breasts (gynecomastia), and an increased risk for prostate cancer. Women may grow facial hair, develop male-pattern baldness, experience changes in or cessation of the menstrual cycle, enlargement of the clitoris, and deepened voice. Adolescents taking steroids are at risk of stunted growth due to premature skeletal maturation and accelerated puberty changes, and risk of not reaching expected height if steroid use precedes the typical adolescent growth spurt. Those who inject steroids are at an increased risk of contracting or transmitting HIV/AIDS or hepatitis.

Statistics and Trends

Monitoring the Future Study: Trends in Prevalence of Steroids for 8th-Graders, 10th-Graders, and 12th-Graders; 2013 (in percent)*

Drug	Time Period	8th-Graders	10th-Graders	12th-Graders
Steroids	Lifetime	1.10	1.30	2.10
	Past Year	0.60	0.80	1.50
	Past Month	0.30	0.40	1.00

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Mona Conte, New York

"Everytime I was happy – I drank. Everytime I was sad – I drank. Everytime I was anything – I drank. I couldn't be happier right now to sit here and tell you that I am completely sober for 6 months now. I really give all the thanks in the world to your website. Thanks!!!"

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