

FACT SHEET TWENTY THREE

ANABOLIC STEROIDS

What are Anabolic Steroids?

Anabolic steroids are chemicals that occur naturally in the human body, they are hormones, like testosterone, which are responsible for co-ordinating and stimulating growth and physical development, they also play a crucial role in the control of the reproductive system.

Anabolic steroids are commercially manufactured for the treatment of muscle weakness and anaemia, common 'brand' names include Anadrol, Sustanon 250, Durabolin, Anavar, Dianabol and Stanozolol. Users often refer to them as 'roids'.

Because of their muscle building effects, anabolic steroids are commonly misused by people trying to increase their body mass and / or athletic performance, drug testing in sporting events has become commonplace to detect whether athletes have been using such 'performance enhancing' substances. Anabolic steroids are also prevalent in groups of people who are keen to improve their body size and image such as body builders, fitness enthusiasts and those in jobs where body size is considered an important part of the role.

Anabolic steroids can be taken orally as tablets or injected in liquid form, their effects depend on the amount taken and the strength and purity of the drugs. Users regularly consume the drug in amounts that grossly exceed the medically recommended dose.

The Effects of Anabolic Steroids

When taken as part of a training and exercise regime, anabolic steroids are effective at increasing muscle tissue and hence body mass, the user is also more aggressive and competitive and has an increased sex drive. In sports they are used to increase endurance and stamina during exercise and training and reduce after exercise recovery times.

The Side Effects of Anabolic Steroids

Anabolic steroids occur naturally in the body to stimulate and co-ordinate certain biological functions, overuse disrupts these carefully regulated systems resulting in:

- Early cessation of growth in young people.
- Increased violence and aggression.
- Increased sex drive (which decreases in males with long-term use)

- In males there is a reduction in the amount and quality of the sperm, which may in the long-term cause fertility problems, users may also experience permanent erectile problems, testicular atrophy and breast enlargement.
- In females there is an increase in body hair and facial hair, deepening of the voice, the menstrual cycle is often disrupted, breast size is reduced and there is an increase in clitoris size, these changes are irreversible.

Other physical side effects caused by anabolic steroids are liver problems and hepatitis, increased water retention and high blood pressure and if an individual is injecting the drug they have an increased risk of contracting blood borne infections such as HIV/AIDS and hepatitis through contaminated injecting equipment.

Psychological problems may include depression, confusion, paranoia and sleep problems, side effects which usually pass when the person stops taking the drug. Psychological dependence is common and during withdrawal users often complain of lethargy and depression. There is a danger that while using or withdrawing from anabolic steroids the user may seek, and become dependant on, other substances such as alcohol to help them to sleep or to deal with the other consequences of their drug misuse - physical or psychological.