

# STEROIDS

## What Do they Really Do to Our Bodies?

*Steroids are a synthetic artificial version of testosterone, the male sex hormone responsible for the growth of long bones and muscles, and for masculine features such as facial hair and a deeper voice.*

Steroids are strong prescription drugs with a specific medical purpose. They can be taken orally or by injection. Steroids are considered illegal just like heroin or cocaine. This has led to the sale of steroids on the black market, where some come from the licensed manufacturers, but most are counterfeit. Drug dealers will tell you just about anything to make more money. As a result, the steroids that young people take may be impure or unclean, in other words you're not getting what you think you're getting.



Internet photo

Some young people use steroids to increase their performance in sport. Others use steroids to change their appearance. In either case, it is a growing problem.

It isn't a case of just a few "bad kids". There are tens of thousands of young men and women who feel pressured to have a well-built, muscular body like they see in music videos, ads, movies, and TV shows. For many young men, the pressures to build a well-developed body are powerful, personal motivations. They associate this type of body with fame, respect, and sex appeal. These young men see steroids as the solution. They think bigger muscles will mean more respect from their peers and more admiration from others.

Steroids are popular among young people because they increase muscle size and therefore help to increase strength. Regular exercise alone will help to increase strength, but steroids give muscles the potential to grow bigger and stronger more quickly. Sounds like a dream drug.

But there's no magic to steroids. They will **not** necessarily provide young people with the look they want. Few people can build the body types found in ads and videos. Factors such as age, race and genetics play a large role. No amount of steroids can change that fact.

Steroids also have an effect on the reproductive system. The effect however is not so rewarding. In males- the testes can shrink, frequent/painful and continuing erections, and prolonged use can lead to sterility (not able to fertilize an egg) and impotence (difficulty achieving an erection). In females- the menstrual period will become irregular, cause masculine features such as more body hair, a deeper voice and enlargement of the clitoris (female excitable body part), and prolonged use can result in infertility as well as fetal damage. This drug is something that too many people

rush into using without knowing all the facts. Steroids are powerful drugs with dangerous side effects. Some of the consequences of steroid use may seem minor, but you could be charged with illegal consumption or possession, you could become addicted, or you could become very ill from the harmful side effects on the other organs in your body leading to death.

If you use steroids, or if you're thinking about it, you owe it to yourself to be as informed as possible. There are both physical and psychological side effects of steroid use. It is important to be aware of all of these.

### **Physical Side-Effects:**

- persistent headaches, nosebleeds and stomach aches
- severe acne on face and body
- hair loss
- painful breast enlargement
- shrunken testes and lowered sperm count, which may lead to sterility and impotence
- damage/tumors to liver and kidneys, high blood pressure and increased cholesterol levels, which may lead to heart disease (the number one killer in North America).
- stop bones from growing, premature fusion of the long bones, which may lead to stunted growth and never growing to your full height.

### **Psychological Side-Effects:**

- increased aggressiveness and bursts of anger, also known as "Roid Rage"
- frequent and severe mood swings
- edgy, paranoid, sometimes leading to violence - an easy way to lose family and friends
- feeling happy one minute and depressed the next

Some users take other drugs to cover up the negative side effects of steroid use, such as high blood pressure. These other drugs have side effects of their own, which may become more severe when taken with steroids. For example, taking medication for high blood pressure can make you feel sluggish and lower your sex drive. The result? A chemical stew inside a young person's body.

There are some common sense things you can do to protect yourself from ingesting such a drug:

1) Know the signs

2) Understand that the pressures to get "the look" are real

3) Be informed and clear about your position

4) Encourage the healthy pursuit of goals

5) Help yourself and others feel good about themselves without using Steroids

**REMEMBER:** You are your own lab rat for trying non prescribed steroids.

### **Did you know?**

- *The National School Survey on Drugs and Sport (1993) estimates that as many as 83,000 young Canadians between the ages of 11 and 18 have used steroids.*
- *Steroids users estimate that 80% of black market steroids aren't steroids at all.*
- *Among young Canadians who inject, as many as 7,500 may be sharing needles or vials of steroids. Anyone*

*who shares needles or vials is at risk of contracting diseases such as hepatitis B and C and HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.*

- *Research shows that less than 1% of women between the ages of 11 and 18 use steroids. It's primarily a male problem.*

Written from information provided from The Steroid and Body Image Project (an initiative of the Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport in partnership with Health Canada, the Health and Drug Education Series, and the Nova Scotia Department of Health Drug Dependency Services.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact the Student Health Centre on campus at 364-2163.