

STEROIDS

THE FACTS



www.drugaware.com.au

ANABOLIC STEROIDS

STEROIDS

GEAR

STEROIDS

THE LAW

It is illegal to possess, use, manufacture, supply, import or trade steroids without a prescription or licence. Penalties range from a \$2,000 fine and/or a two-year prison term to a \$100,000 fine and/or imprisonment for 25 years. Any person convicted of a drug offence will receive a criminal record and this can lead to difficulties in getting a job, health insurance, credit or visas for overseas travel.

Frequent testing of athletes both in and out of competition increases the chance of athletes getting caught and being banned from competition, sometimes for life.

WHAT ARE STEROIDS?

Steroids are a large group of compounds produced by the body of all animals, including humans. Steroids occur naturally or can be produced synthetically. Different groups of steroids include corticosteroids, anabolic steroids, androgenic steroids, oestrogenic steroids and anti-inflammatory steroids.

In Australia, using steroids without a doctor's prescription is illegal. Steroids may be prescribed by a doctor to treat some illnesses including:

- testosterone deficiency
- certain kinds of anaemia
- some kinds of breast cancer
- calcium deficiency
- muscle-wasting conditions.

Athletes, body builders and some young people may use steroids illegally to improve their appearance or athletic performance. The types of steroids used by people who wish to build muscle and increase their body size are usually anabolic steroids. These are a group of drugs that include the male sex hormone testosterone and its synthetic alternatives.

Testosterone is the hormone responsible for the development of sex characteristics. For example, at puberty, it produces acne, growth spurts, body hair, deepening of the voice and development of male sex organs. It is found in large amounts in males and small amounts in females.

Anabolic androgenic steroids have two types of effects. Anabolic effects include increased muscle growth. The androgenic component increases the body's male characteristics.

In this fact sheet, the word steroid refers to anabolic and androgenic steroids.

WHERE DO STEROIDS COME FROM?

The use of steroids began with body builders and weight lifters in the late 1950s and has since spread to other sports. Many drugs, including steroids, have been banned from sporting competitions to protect the health of athletes and to ensure fair competition.

HOW ARE STEROIDS USED?

Steroids are taken orally as tablets or injected into muscles. People who use steroids illegally may take several times more than a doctor would normally prescribe. Steroids can be taken using the following methods:

- **Stacking:** Taking several different types of steroids at the same time in an attempt to improve their effectiveness.

- **Cycling:** Taking multiple doses of steroids over a period of time, stopping for a while and then starting again.
- **Pyramiding:** Increasing steroid use to a peak amount and then slowly reducing the amount.

Each of these methods can increase the risk and harms of steroid use.

HOW MANY PEOPLE USE STEROIDS?

The 2004 National Drug Strategy Household Survey reported that less than one percent (0.2%) of Western Australians aged 14 years and over had ever used steroids (for non-medical purposes). Lifetime use of steroids was greatest among 30- to 39-year-olds, particularly among males.

HEALTH EFFECTS OF USING STEROIDS

Using steroids may cause many negative physical and psychological (mental) side-effects. Some of the effects are irreversible and some can lead to death.

The effects of steroids will vary from person to person depending on the following characteristics:

- physical size
- gender
- diet
- exercise level
- age
- health
- the amount of steroid used and its purity
- whether the steroid is taken orally or by injection.

HEALTH EFFECTS FOR MALES AND FEMALES CAN INCLUDE:

MALES	FEMALES	MALES AND FEMALES
• shrinking testicles	• growth of facial hair	• acne
• impotence	• changes in the menstrual cycle (it may stop)	• bloating
• testicular cysts	• enlargement of the clitoris	• high blood pressure
• reduced sperm count	• deepened voice	• liver damage and cancer
• baldness	• decreased breast size	• increased risk of injury
• pain when urinating	• hair growth on the back and bottom	• increased cholesterol level
• development of breasts	• infertility	• decreased immune function
• decreased testosterone production		• increased muscle size and strength
		• damage to kidneys and heart
		• insomnia
		• acne
		• urinary tract infections

Risks are especially high for young people. If steroids are taken while a person is still growing they can cause a number of problems including stunted growth.

Unsafe injecting practices also carry the risk of transmission of HIV and other blood-borne diseases such as hepatitis B and hepatitis C. Injecting can cause muscle damage, scarring and infection at the injection site.

While the side effects of steroid use is reversible in men this is not the case for women for whom the side-effects are more likely to be permanent.

Many steroids are illegally made and can contain harmful, unknown substances that may increase the side effects. Often black market steroids are designed for animals and some may not contain any anabolic steroids at all.

STERIODS AND MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

Steroid use can cause anxiety, depression, paranoia and psychosis in those people who have a vulnerability to mental health problems.

RELATIONSHIPS

Drug use can lead to social and emotional problems and affect a person's relationship with family and friends. People who use steroids often report they experience:

- mood changes
- violent behaviour
- depression
- anger
- addiction or dependence.
- increased aggression – roid rage
- frustration
- over competitiveness
- irrational behaviour

TOLERANCE, DEPENDENCE AND WITHDRAWAL

Regular, heavy steroid use can lead to tolerance and dependence.

- **Tolerance** – This means that a person needs more of the drug to achieve the same effects they did previously with smaller amounts.
- **Dependence** – People who use steroids may become dependent on the drug and continue to use it despite the side effects and health risks.
- **Withdrawal** – When a person stops using steroids they may experience withdrawal symptoms. While there is little medical evidence of withdrawal symptoms, anecdotal reports indicate some people experience symptoms including headaches, insomnia, cravings, decreased sexual libido, depression, suicidal thoughts, fatigue, restlessness, muscle pain, anorexia and dissatisfaction with body image.

STEROIDS AND PREGNANCY

Most drugs can affect an unborn child. Use of anabolic androgenic steroids is definitely not recommended if you are considering pregnancy or are pregnant. Not only are women less likely to become pregnant if they are using anabolic androgenic steroids but if already pregnant these steroids may cause the development of male secondary sex characteristics in a female foetus.

It is recommended that women check with their doctor (or other health professional) if they are using or planning to use drugs while pregnant or breastfeeding, including prescribed and over-the-counter medicines.

COST

The street price of steroids depends on availability, supply and the type of steroid being purchased. The cost of purchasing steroids can lead to financial problems for both occasional and regular users.

TAKING CARE

It is safer not to use steroids unless under strict medical supervision. If, however, you or someone you know uses steroids, remember the following:

- It is safer not to inject drugs. If you or someone you know does inject, always use clean equipment (needle, syringe, swab, tourniquet, spoon, glass, filter and sterile water) to reduce the risk of infection and don't share gear. Fitpacks® which contain clean syringes are available from:
 - most pharmacies
 - needle and syringe exchange programs. (For information on opening times and locations of these programs phone the Alcohol and Drug Information Service, contact details are outlined at the back of this booklet)
 - some regional hospitals, health centres and nursing posts.

- Beware of the risks of dependence and physical and mental side-effects. Seek medical advice if necessary.
- Muscle growth, increased strength and improved physical appearance can be achieved naturally through a suitable exercise program and an adequate diet. Advice from qualified medical or sporting professionals can be obtained to help develop a suitable training program and diet.

TREATMENT PATHWAYS

There are a variety of treatment pathways available for people with steroid-related problems. The drug(s) used and the availability of services as well as the user's health, desired outcome, support network and unique circumstances need to be taken into consideration. Deciding on the best treatment pathway or combination of pathways is best done in consultation with a drug and alcohol counsellor.

MORE INFORMATION

For up-to-date information about steroids or other drugs call the Alcohol and Drug Information Service or Parent Drug Information Service, or visit www.drugaware.com.au

Alcohol and Drug Information Service

- Access information about drugs confidentially and quickly.
- Talk to a professionally trained counsellor about alcohol or other drugs.
- Find out about other services.

(08) 9442 5000

1800 198 024 toll free country callers

Parent Drug Information Service

- Drug information and support for parents and family members.
- Talk to a professionally trained counsellor about alcohol and other drugs.
- Talk confidentially to another parent for strategies and support.
- Find out where to go for further help.

(08) 9442 5050

1800 653 203 toll free country callers

www.drugaware.com.au

- Access detailed information about drugs.
- Find out about the latest issues.
- Post questions and have them answered anonymously by health professionals.
- Find links to other useful sites.

For further information about the Drug and Alcohol Office's Prevention Directorate programs, publications or resources call (08) 9370 0358 or visit www.dao.health.wa.gov.au

ANABOLIC STEROIDS

STEROIDS

GEAR

STEROIDS

REFERENCES

Beel, A., Maycock, B. & McLean, N. 1998. *Current perspectives on anabolic steroids*, *Drug and Alcohol Review*, vol. 17, pp. 87-103.

Drug and Alcohol Office, Western Australia. 2005. *2004 National Drug Strategy Household Survey: First results for Western Australia*. Perth: Drug and Alcohol Office.

Hansen, D. & Steroid Strategic Working Party, *Geared Up*. WA Drug Abuse Strategy Office, Perth.

Inaba, D.S., Cohen, W.E. & Holstein, M.E. 1997. *Uppers, Downers, All rounders: Physical and Mental Effects of Psychoactive Drugs*. 3rd edn, CNS Publications Inc, Oregon.

Julien, R. 1995. *A Primer of Drug Action: a Concise, Non-technical Guide to the Actions, Uses, and Side Effects of Psychoactive Drugs*. 7th edn, WH Freeman, New York.

Maycock, B. & Hansen, D. 1998. *Final report for the Illicit Steroid Project*. Perth, unpub.

Mims Australia 2000. *2002 Mims Annual*. 26th edn, Tien Wah Press (Pte.) Ltd, Singapore.

Van Helder, W.P., Kofman, E. & Tremblay, M.S. 1991, *Anabolic steroids in sport*. *Canadian Journal Sports Science*, vol. 16, no. 4, pp. 248-257.

W.B. Saunders Company 2000. *Dorland's Illustrated Medical Dictionary*. 29th edn, W.B. Saunders Company, Philadelphia.

Wroblewska, A.M. 1997. *Androgenic anabolic steroids and body dysmorphia in young men*. *Journal Pschomatic research*, vol. 42, no. 3, pp. 225-234.

While every reasonable effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of this brochure, no guarantee can be given that its contents are free from error or omissions. The Minister for Health, the Drug and Alcohol Office, the State of Western Australia and their employees and agents expressly disclaim liability for any act or omission occurring in reliance on the information in this brochure and for any consequences of any such act or omission.

Changes in circumstances after the date of publication of this brochure inevitably will result in this brochure becoming outdated in some respects. It is the responsibility of readers of this brochure to keep themselves updated with any changes or developments.



www.drugaware.com.au

**For information on steroids, visit www.drugaware.com.au
or for confidential advice and counselling call the Alcohol and
Drug Information Service 24 hour helpline
on 9442 5000 or 1800 198 024 (country callers).**