

Editorial

Sports and Steroids; Is It Worth It?

Mohsin Masud Jan

Editor

Now, we have all heard stories about the use, rather misuse of steroids among athletes, more prominently bodybuilders, but before delving into that, let's take a look at what exactly are these steroids? 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. Health care providers may often prescribe steroids to treat hormonal issues, such as delayed puberty. Steroids can also treat diseases that cause muscle loss, such as cancer and AIDS. But, today, our topic of concern is the abuse, rather than the appropriate use of steroids, we won't go deeper into that.

Some athletes and bodybuilders abuse these drugs to boost performance or improve their physical appearance. People who abuse anabolic steroids usually take them orally or inject them into the muscles. These doses may be 10 to 100 times higher than doses prescribed to treat medical conditions. Steroids are also applied to the skin as a cream, gel, or patch.

Some athletes and others who abuse steroids believe that they can avoid unwanted side effects or maximize the drugs' effects by taking them in ways that include:

- cycling—taking doses for a period of time, stopping for a time, and then restarting
- stacking—combining two or more different types of steroids
- pyramiding—slowly increasing the dose or frequency of abuse, reaching a peak amount, and then gradually tapering off

There is no scientific evidence that any of these practices reduce the harmful medical consequences of these drugs.

Why do these athletes abuse steroids in such a manner? Let's take a look at the athletic benefits of roids.

- 1) Increased Muscle Strength
- 2) Increased Body Size
- 3) Increased Healing Rate
- 4) Increased Stamina and Energy
- 5) Helps in losing fat

Now, Considering these benefits, who would not want to pop a few pills to achieve their goals, more so when your livelihood depends on your ability to move faster, to lift more weight, or just to simply look good without a shirt on. And it is the desire to achieve all these goals

that drives athletes to use steroids, and in the long run end up abusing them.

Moving on, let us take a look at the cons related with roid use.

Short-Term Effects: Abuse of anabolic steroids may lead to mental problems, such as:

- paranoid (extreme, unreasonable) jealousy
- extreme irritability
- delusions—false beliefs or ideas
- impaired judgment

Extreme mood swings can also occur, including "roid rage"—angry feelings and behavior that may lead to violence.

Aside from mental problems, steroid use commonly causes severe acne. It also causes the body to swell, especially in the hands and feet.

Long-Term Effects

Anabolic steroid abuse may lead to serious, even permanent, health problems such as:

- kidney problems or failure
- liver damage
- enlarged heart, high blood pressure, and changes in blood cholesterol, all of which increase the risk of stroke and heart attack, even in young people

Several other effects are gender- and age-specific:

- In men:
 - shrinking testicles
 - decreased sperm count
 - baldness
 - development of breasts
 - increased risk for prostate cancer
- In women:
 - growth of facial hair or excess body hair
 - male-pattern baldness
 - changes in or stop in the menstrual cycle
 - enlarged clitoris
 - deepened voice
- In teens:
 - stunted growth (when high hormone levels from steroids signal to the body to stop bone growth too early)
 - stunted height (if teens use steroids before their growth spurt)

Some of these physical changes, such as shrinking sex organs in men, can add to mental side effects such as mood disorders.

Internationally, in countries such as the USA, there are heavy rules and regulations in place to prevent athletes from abusing steroids, and even then, every now and then, some athlete or bodybuilder dies due to the inherent risks associated with steroid abuse. But, in a country such as ours, a developing country, where there are no rules and regulations per se, let alone sports, and where most medications are available over the counter without any hassle, steroid abuse is rampant. And add to that the illiteracy, that rampant steroid abuse instantly turns a hundred times more fatal, and as we so often see on the news, some aspiring bodybuilder dies

due to steroid misuse, because he had no idea what or how to use steroids let alone their inherent risks.

The mere lack of awareness of the side effects of steroids, and the burning desire to build a body like that of the greats of bodybuilding, leads several youngsters to the use of steroids, and not knowing what the side effects are or how to deal with them, many of these youngsters end up paying a heavy price for the physique they had been trying to achieve. As to this end, there needs to be an effort made by health professionals and gym owners to thwart the use of anabolic steroids. The government needs to ensure that such medications are not available to the general public without a doctor's prescription. And all sports boards, need to enforce more strict regulations when it comes to steroid use and their athletes.