

# Your Health

by Dr. Paul Roumeliotis

## Anabolic Steroid Use Is Dangerous

With all the media attention on “performance enhancing steroids” lately, many young athletes wonder what the big deal is. Hopefully this article will help clarify how dangerous these substances are. The more we can convince athletes that taking steroids is harmful and potentially deadly, the less they will be affected by peer (or coach) pressure. It sounds easy to resist, but in fact, young athletes are continually tempted by societies’ high rewards for success in sports and a “win at all costs” attitude. So our kids are often getting mixed messages. What they need is a “clear and consistent opposing message” by their parents, teachers, coaches and other mentors. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, the use of a variety of substances has long accompanied efforts to enhance athletic performance and is not limited to professional and Olympic athletes only. In fact, anabolic steroid use among adolescent athletes continues to increase.

### What exactly are anabolic steroids?

It is important to note that these are not the same as the corticosteroids used to treat asthma and other inflammatory diseases. Anabolic steroids are illegal substances only available on the black market and may be taken either by mouth or by injection. Some of the common orally administered anabolic steroids include oxymetholone (Anadrol), oxandrolone (Anavar), methandrostenolone (Dianabol), and stanozolol (Winstrol). The injectable steroids include nandrolone decanoate (Deca-Durabolin), nandrolone phenpropionate (Durabolin), testosterone cypionate (Depo-Testosterone), and boldenone undecylenate (Equipoise). Anabolic steroids are generally used in a combination of oral and injectable dosages during 6 to 12 week periods and are believed to work by stimulating the body’s protein production.

### Why do athletes take anabolic steroids?

Coaches and players desire increased muscle mass/strength, rapid healing of injuries, aggression and obtaining a winning edge.

Unfortunately, there is a long list of side effects, some of which are potentially deadly, that over-rides these desired goals. The side effects of anabolic steroid use include:

- liver damage
- testicular atrophy (shrinking), breast enlargement and prostate cancer in males
- menstrual irregularities and loss of breast tissue in females
- acne and excessive body hair
- shorter adult height
- increased rate of muscle strains/ruptures
- decreased glucose tolerance (Type 2 Diabetes)
- deepening of the voice
- cardiac problems including increased cholesterol and blood pressure, and blood clot formation
- psychological effects including mood swings, aggression (steroid rage), depression and psychosis

I think that parents and other child caretakers including coaches should be well aware of the side effects of anabolic steroid use and be prepared to offer alternative ways to achieve athletic enhancement such as proper workout techniques and a healthy diet and lifestyle. Young athletes should be constantly reminded that high athletic performance and success can be achieved without the use of enhancing performance substances. Pointing out role models in the sports community whose success did not depend on the use of drugs is also very helpful.

On a final note, erythropoietin and growth hormones are also “performance enhancement” substances. Although they are not anabolic steroids, they are dangerous as well.

*Dr. Paul Roumeliotis is the Medical Officer of Health for the Eastern Ontario Health Unit and Assistant Professor of Pediatrics, McGill University. © Dr. Paul Roumeliotis*