

You've seen them, and you thought you knew what was going on. The muscle-heads at the gym, the all-star basketball player, the amazing offensive tackle, and the lightning fast swimmer. All of them used steroids, and you knew it. They were all unnaturally strong, and looked like gods. But what you could not see is the terrible side effects which come through the use of anabolic steroids. These powerful drugs have both positive and negative results from their use. Along with increased strength and size, users of steroids suffer from ailments like cancer, bad acne, hair loss, damaged organs and intense mood swings.

Anabolic steroids are a group of muscle building chemicals, which are synthetic versions of the male hormone, testosterone. Developed in 1935 they were prescribed to aid in muscle and tissue repair by those who had undergone surgery or had degenerative diseases. Now they are used by athletes and patients alike. But they are illegal to use if not prescribed by a physician, and have been banned by nearly all athletic organizations, both professional and amateur.

When you think of someone who uses steroids you typically picture someone who is massive, and whose muscle mass is very well defined. A picture comes to mind of the giant body builder, who is so big he can't touch his back because his biceps are in the way, but he can manage to bench press his car. The possible growth and development is amazing. With much less work necessary, the results can be astounding. Athletes can get bigger, stronger and faster, with less effort than previous. The limits of an athletes potential with steroids seem to be unbounded. These are the positive aspects to the use of steroids. One study showed that as much as ten pounds of lean muscle mass could be gained by a mature adult using steroids over a years period. The resulting size and strength increase would be greater more easily attained than without use of steroids. (Taylor pg 45) Also, the type of body structure that many males are looking for can be easily obtained through the use of steroids. Large pectoral muscles, as well and big biceps and a well defined stomach are what many teenage users are after. Society dictates what the current trends are, and our society has dictated that athletic looking men (and women) are in. But not everyone can be so fortunate to have a beautiful body with their given gene pool. So through the use of steroids, people can attain the wonderful body that they so desire. One ex-user commented that after he had used steroids and bulked up, he was much more popular with the females, and got much more respect from his male peers.

(Deacon pg 52)

Steroids are also used for therapeutic applications as well, although their use here is much less well known. Steroids can be used to promote healing in patients who have recently undergone surgery, they also improve the appetite and increase protein production. They also help protect blood for producing bone marrow after radiation therapy. Also, steroids can be used to help treat skeletal disorders such as osteoporosis broken bones because they aid in the reconstruction of the bone matrix. (Goldman pg 201) The positive effects of steroids are quite obvious, and quite powerful.

Unfortunately, the use of steroids tends to result in many damaging side effects in the users. The mournful stories of dominating athletes who used steroids, who are no longer great at their one time profession seems to dot the newspaper pages quite regularly. They always say that they realized too late the damaging effects that the drugs had on their bodies. Steroids can have many different and adverse reactions with the human body. Some effects are only cosmetic: hair loss on the head, and a increase of hair on the back, chest and abdomen of males is sometimes present. Greater concentrations of acne has also been traced to the use of steroids, as has gynecomastia, the development of abnormal breast tissue in males, although this is much less frequent. (Yesalis pg 115) More dangerous results are symptoms such as heart disease, impaired glucose tolerance, hypertension, liver toxicity, jaundice and tumors have all been linked to the use of anabolic steroids. Steroids tend to increase blood pressure, which makes the heart pump harder, eventually weakening it. They also prevent the removal of cholesterol from the walls of veins, which can also have negative effect on the body. In the liver, elevated levels of bile can be present, as well as peliosis hepatitis or blood pools in the liver. Also liver cancer has been linked to the use of steroids. They can also cause tumor's in the kidney, known as Wilm's tumor, which is another form of cancer. Also, the extended use of steroids can cause the tendons to lose their elasticity, and begin to break or tear after extended use of steroids. (Goldman pg 131) Another problem common to the use of steroids is a psychological phenomena commonly known as "'roid rage". This constitutes a more aggressively natured person, who is more subject to mood swings. A typically calm, intelligent person could be transformed into a crazed senseless being. The slightest upsetting factor could set them off. These mood swings and shifts tend to be temporary and cease after discontinued use of the drugs, but some of the other effects are lasting, and can be extremely devastating. Less harmful,

but important as well is the fact that steroids are banned by nearly every athletic organization, and if it is determined that an athlete used steroids, all medals, trophies, prizes and glory can be stripped away.

Athletes who train with the use of steroids are taking a huge gamble. Although steroids can have amazing results, and seem to be the greatest thing on earth, they also hold a cornucopia of terrible things in store for the person who uses them irresponsibly. They must evaluate for themselves if the potential physical prowess that they could attain through the use of steroids is worth the possibility of the devastating side effects. They must also keep in mind the consequences that they could encounter if they do use steroids, which are an illegal drug.