

What are steroids?



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What Are Steroids? "Steroids" has more than one meaning. Your body naturally produces some steroids, to help you fight stress and grow bigger during puberty. (But your body knows just the right amount that you need, so there's no need to take any extra.) There's also a type of medicine called steroids that people might take if they have pain, asthma, or a skin problem. But these aren't the kind of steroids getting attention in sports. When people say steroids (say: stare-oydz), they often mean illegal anabolic steroids.

Anabolic steroids are artificially produced hormones that are the same as, or similar to, androgens, the male-type sex hormones in the body. The most powerful of these is testosterone (say: tes-tos-tuh-rone). Anabolic steroids can be taken in the form of pills, powders, or injections. Anabolic steroids are always illegal, meaning that you could get arrested for buying, selling, or taking them. Some athletes take anabolic steroids because of their testosterone-like effects, such as increasing muscle mass and strength. This might sound like just a guy thing, but girls also have used steroids to get stronger and change the way they look. And it's not only professional athletes who have taken these illegal drugs. Investigations and studies have shown that teens, college athletes, and others have taken steroids. There are supplements available that contain anabolic steroids. You might see ads for these on the Internet or in the back of sports or body building magazines. Some have been banned in the United States while others are still legal.

Legal or illegal, these supplements can cause health problems. Kids should not take any steroid supplement, even those that are still on the market.

Dangers of Steroids Anabolic steroids cause many different types of problems. Less serious side effects include acne, oily hair, purple or red spots on the body, swelling of the legs and feet, and persistent bad breath. A

kid or teen who takes steroids might not grow as tall as he or she was supposed to grow. Some other serious and long-lasting side effects are: - premature balding - dizziness - mood swings, including anger and sadness - seeing or hearing things that aren't there (hallucinations) - extreme feelings of mistrust or fear (paranoia) - problems sleeping - nausea - vomiting - trembling - high blood pressure that can damage the heart or blood vessels over time - aching joints - greater chance of injuring muscles and tendons - jaundice or yellowing of the skin; liver damage - trouble peeing - increased risk of developing heart disease, stroke, and some types of cancer These risks affect girls: - increased facial hair growth - deeper voice, like a man's - shrinking of the breasts - period changes Specific risks for boys include: - shrinkage of the testicles and penis problems - pain when urinating (peeing) - breast development Because steroids can be injected (given in a shot), users run the risk of getting illnesses that can be passed through needles that are dirty, or shared. These include HIV/AIDS and hepatitis, a serious liver disease. Though some problems may show up right away, others may not appear for years. One former Oakland Raiders lineman who died of brain cancer believed that steroid use during his football career was one reason he got the disease. Using Steroids Isn't Playing Fair Your health is the No. 1 reason not to use steroids or a steroid supplement. But there's another very important reason: It's just not fair. When people use steroids, it gives them an unfair advantage against others who trained and practiced without using illegal steroids. And because all levels of sports – from high school to the pros – are testing athletes for steroid use, there's a growing chance the person will get caught. If caught, he or she will face a lot of embarrassment and could be banned from the sport. But maybe worst of all, any

achievements the athlete made while on steroids could be questioned.

Someone might say, " He didn't really deserve to be on the All-Star team, he was on steroids." Or, " She shouldn't have that trophy, she was cheating