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# Performance Playbook: The Consequences of Anabolic Steroid Abuse

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## **PERFORMANCE PLAYBOOK** **The Consequences of Anabolic Steroid Abuse**

Many young athletes are convinced that the only way to become a champion is by using anabolic steroids. Coaches and others can begin to counteract the attraction of these drugs by helping educate the athletes about the potential harmful consequences of anabolic steroid use.

### **LIVER DAMAGE**

Nearly all of the anabolic steroids taken by mouth cause abnormal liver function. These abnormalities range from the common, but usually harmless, leakage of enzymes from the damaged liver tissue into the blood to rare, but very serious, liver cancer and liver bleeding.

The appearance of liver enzymes in the blood ordinarily ceases when athletes stop using steroids, but liver cancer and bleeding have caused deaths among a few athletes who have abused anabolic steroids.

### **RISK OF HEART DISEASE**

Many athletes who abuse anabolic steroids have high blood pressure (hypertension). They also have decreased amounts of HDL-cholesterol, the so-called "good cholesterol," that helps the body avoid the buildup of fat in the walls of the arteries. Both high blood pressure and low HDL-cholesterol increase the chance of having serious heart disease at a relatively early age.

### **SEXUAL & REPRODUCTIVE DISORDERS**

Many male athletes who take large doses of anabolic steroids have shrunken testicles. They also have such poor sperm production that virtually all of them who have used steroids for six months or more are sterile. Sperm count may not return to normal for seven months or more after discontinuing steroid use.

In many men, steroid abuse leads to a feminizing growth of the nipples that can only be corrected with surgery. In most women, on the other hand, steroid abuse causes shrinkage of the breasts to more masculine proportions.

Other masculinizing effects of anabolic steroid use by females are very common, including the growth of facial hair, thinning of head hair and possible baldness, deepening of the voice, irregularity or absence of the menstrual cycle, enlargement of the clitoris, and shrinking of the uterus.

Baldness, growth of facial hair, enlargement of the clitoris, and deepening of the voice usually cannot be reversed, even when steroids are no longer used these are permanent changes.

### **PSYCHOLOGICAL DISORDERS**

Among the more commonly reported psychological effects of steroid abuse are increases or decreases in sex drive, increased aggressive behavior, mood elevation or depression, and "psychological addiction" to the drugs.

More rare are schizophrenia and psychotic behavior patterns. For example, steroid abusers

have been known to head-butt the windshields out of cars or to purposely crash their cars into trees.

Even more frightening are claims by several athletes charged with murder that they committed them under a "steroid rage."

### **EFFECTS ON GROWTH**

The long bones of young people up to 18 years and sometimes older are still growing. If young athletes abuse anabolic steroids, the growth plates of those bones may close earlier than usual. This diminishes the height they could have reached as adults had they not taken steroids.

### **CONCLUSION**

Young people should be told that very few athletes are known to have become seriously ill or to have died from steroid abuse and that habits such as smoking tobacco or driving while intoxicated are probably far more deadly. On the other hand, they should also be told that few, if any, steroid abusers escape all of the potential harmful effects of these drugs.

Finally, athletes should be reminded that, as was once the case for tobacco smoking, it is possible that we will not know the full extent of the harmful effects of anabolic steroids for another 20 to 30 years.