Steroids:
Play Safe, Play Fair

Athletes, whether they are young or old, professional or amateur, are always looking to gain an advantage over their opponents. The desire for an "edge" exists in all sports, at all levels of play. Successful athletes rely on practice and hard work to increase their skill, speed, power, and ability. However, some athletes resort to drugs to improve their performance on the field or the court.

Some high school and even middle school students are using steroids to gain an edge, improve their skill level, or become more athletic. Steroid use is not limited to males. More and more females are putting themselves at risk by using these drugs. It is important to know that using anabolic steroids not only is illegal, but it also can have serious side effects.

What are steroids?
You may have heard them called 'roids, juice, hype, or pump. Anabolic steroids are powerful drugs that many people take in high doses to boost athletic performance. Anabolic means "building body tissue." Anabolic steroids help build muscle tissue and increase body mass by acting like the body's natural male hormone, testosterone.

Lower doses of anabolic steroids sometimes are used to treat a handful of very serious medical conditions. They should not be confused with corticosteroids, which are used to treat common medical conditions such as asthma and arthritis. Corticosteroids are strong medications, but do not have muscle-building effects. Anabolic steroids are the ones abused by athletes and others who want a shortcut to becoming bigger and stronger.

Who uses steroids?
In the past, steroid use was seen mostly in college, Olympic, and professional sports. Today, steroids are being used by athletes as well as non-athletes, in high schools and middle schools. Most major professional and amateur athletic organizations have banned steroids for use by their athletes. These organizations include the International Olympic Committee, National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), and the National Football League (NFL).

Most commonly, steroid use can be found among the following groups:
- Athletes involved in sports that rely on strength and size, like football, wrestling, or baseball
- Endurance athletes, such as those involved in track-and-field and swimming
- Athletes involved in weight training or bodybuilding
- Anyone interested in building and defining muscles

How are steroids used?
Steroids can be taken in the following two ways:
- By mouth (pills)
- Injected with a needle (Athletes who share needles to inject steroids also are at risk for serious infections including Hepatitis B and HIV, the AIDS virus.)

Some athletes take even higher doses, called "megadoses," to produce faster results. Others gradually increase the amount they take over time, which is called "pyramiding." Taking different kinds of anabolic steroids, possibly along with other drugs, is a particularly dangerous practice known as "stacking."

Will steroids make me a better athlete?
No. Steroids cannot improve an athlete's agility or skill. Many factors help determine athletic ability, including genetics, body size, age, sex, diet, and how hard the athlete trains. It is clear that the medical dangers of steroid use far outweigh the advantage of gains in strength or muscle mass.

What are the side effects of steroids?
Steroids can cause serious health problems. Many changes take place inside the body and may not be noticed until it is too late. Some of the effects will go away when steroid use stops, but some may not.

For both sexes
Possible side effects for males and females include the following:
- High blood pressure and heart disease
- Liver damage and cancers
- Stroke and blood clots
- Urinary and bowel problems, such as diarrhea
- Headaches, aching joints, and muscle cramps
- Nausea and vomiting
- Sleep problems
- Increased risk of ligament and tendon injuries
- Severe acne, especially on face and back
- Baldness

A special danger to adolescents
High school and middle school students and athletes need to be aware of the effect steroids have on growth. Anabolic steroids, even in small doses, have been shown to stop growth too soon. Adolescents also may be at risk for becoming dependent on steroids. Adolescents who use steroids are also more likely to use other addictive drugs and alcohol.
Males
One of the more disturbing effects of steroid use for males is that the body begins to produce less of its own testosterone. As a result, the testicles may begin to shrink. Following is a list of some of the other effects of steroid use for males:
- Reduced sperm count
- Impotence
- Increase in nipple and breast size (gynecomastia)
- Enlarged prostate (gland that mixes fluid with sperm to form semen)

Females
Since steroids act as a male hormone, females may experience the following side effects:
- Reduced breast size
- Enlarged clitoris (a very sensitive part of the genitals)
- Increase in facial and body hair
- Deepened voice
- Menstrual problems

A word about... supplements
Over-the-counter supplements such as creatine and androstenedione (“andro”) are gaining popularity. Though these supplements are not steroids, manufacturers claim they can build muscles, and improve strength and stamina, without the side effects of steroids.

It is important to know that these substances are not regulated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and are not held to the same strict standards as drugs. Like steroids, they are also banned by the NFL, NCAA, and International Olympic Committee.

Although both creatine and androstenedione occur naturally in foods, there are serious concerns about the long-term effects of using them as supplements. These products may be unsafe. Remember, there is no replacement for a healthy diet, proper training, and practice.

Emotional effects
Steroids also can have the following effects on the mind and behavior:
- “Roid rage”—severe, aggressive behavior that may result in violence, such as fighting or destroying property
- Severe mood swings
- Hallucinations—seeing or hearing things that are not really there
- Paranoia—extreme feelings of mistrust and fear
- Anxiety and panic attacks
- Depression and thoughts of suicide
- An angry, hostile, or irritable mood

Play safe, play fair
Success in sports takes talent, skill, and most of all, practice and hard work. Using steroids is a form of cheating and interferes with fair competition. More importantly, they are dangerous to your health. There are many healthy ways to increase your strength or improve your appearance. If you are serious about your sport and your health, keep the following tips in mind:
- Train safely, without using drugs.
- Eat a healthy diet.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Set realistic goals and be proud of yourself when you reach them.
- Seek out training supervision, coaching, and advice from a reliable professional.
- Avoid injuries by playing safely and using protective gear.
- Talk to your pediatrician about nutrition, your health, preventing injury, and safe ways to gain strength.

If you, your friends, or teammates are using steroids, get help. Share this information with friends and teammates. Take a stand against the use of steroids and other drugs. Truly successful athletes combine their natural abilities with hard work to win. There is no quick and easy way to become the best.

For more information, contact the following organizations:
National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA)
888/644-6432
Web site: http://www.nida.nih.gov/

National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information (NCADI)
800/729-6686
Web site: http://www.health.org

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

From your doctor

847-398-0400