

## CHOICE ISN'T ALWAYS EASY. As an athlete, you make choices every day that can determine if you succeed or fail.

Split-second decisions made during competition can immediately affect whether you win or lose. Other choices – such as how hard you practice, what you eat and how much you sleep – will influence how well you perform on any given day. Decisions about the number of sports you play, who you work with as your coach and how you deal with injury and defeat have more long-term consequences. These choices aren't always easy.

Another choice athletes must make involves the use of drugs to enhance athletic performance or appearance. And like all other choices, the decision to use drugs such as anabolic steroids will have both immediate and long-term consequences. All choices have consequences, but those that affect your health are more serious than others.

### Anabolic Steroids

The hormones used by some athletes to increase muscle mass and strength are **anabolic, androgenic steroids**. Anabolic, androgenic steroids are synthetic forms of the male hormone testosterone. Like testosterone, these steroids have anabolic effects – primarily the increase in muscle tissue – and androgenic effects – the masculinizing effects boys experience during puberty. No anabolic, androgenic steroid is purely anabolic. In other words, the use of the steroids won't lead to muscle growth without also leading to other unintended, undesirable side effects.

Anabolic, androgenic steroids are different from steroids doctors prescribe to treat asthma and inflammation. These steroids are **corticosteroids**. Corticosteroids might be abused by athletes too, but generally not for purposes related to gaining mass and strength.

The temptation to use anabolic steroids is understandable. There is a lot of pressure on young people to excel in athletics or to have a certain type of body. Research shows that athletes use steroids for one of two reasons: to gain strength or to recover more quickly from injury. In addition, studies show that nearly one-third of high-school age steroid users do not participate in organized athletics and are taking the drugs primarily to modify their appearance.

### Facts about Anabolic Steroids

These are facts that should be known to anyone who desires to be a better athlete or to change how he or she looks.

- Steroids are powerful drugs. Doctors prescribe them only for specific wasting diseases and for men who don't produce testosterone.
- The possession or sale of anabolic steroids in the United States without a prescription is illegal.
- The vast majority of high school and college athletes compete steroid-free.
- Athletes who use injectable anabolic steroids in high school have tested positive in collegiate drug tests – months after they stop injecting steroids.
- Drug users who inject steroids are at greater risk for infections, including HIV and hepatitis.
- Androstenedione and other similar hormonal substances are controlled substances and are no longer available in dietary supplements.

### Side Effects from use of Anabolic Steroids

All professional and amateur sports organizations ban the use of steroids because of their dangerous side effects and because steroids give competitors an unfair advantage.

- The use of steroids by young people whose bones are still growing will result in stunted growth.
- Girls, like boys, use steroids to excel at their sport, recover from injury and modify their appearance.
- Girls who use steroids can grow body and facial hair and experience permanent voice lowering.
- Boys who use steroids can form breast tissue, begin to lose their hair (go bald) and have their testicles shrink.
- Boys and girls who use steroids can have thick, oily skin, which often leads to severe acne on the face and body.
- Steroid users report an initial feeling of well-being that is later replaced by mood swings, loss of sleep and paranoia. Reports of depression are common in people who stop using steroids.
- Some athletes have died from steroid use either because of the effects of the steroids on their body or the effects of discontinuing steroid use without a doctor's help.

***Athletes who are caught using steroids embarrass themselves, their parents, their coaches and their schools.***



## Additional Help to make the Right Choice

There are many resources available to you to help you achieve your athletic and personal goals – resources geared specifically to athletes like you who want to succeed without using anabolic steroids. A listing of excellent online resources is available at [www.nfhs.org](http://www.nfhs.org).

### References

- "Hormone Abuse." The Hormone Foundation.
- "Steroid Abuse by School-Age Children." U.S. Department of Justice, Drug Enforcement Administration.
- "Use of Performance-Enhancing Substances." American Academy of Pediatrics.

Special thanks to the Orell Wade Coaches Directory.

*\* This brochure, in a pdf format, can be downloaded from the NFHS Web site at [www.nfhs.org](http://www.nfhs.org).*



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**MAKE  
THE RIGHT  
CHOICE**

*It's not really winning if you cheat.*