

What are steroids?

Steroids are synthetic drugs that resemble natural hormones made in the body. The type of steroids that are misused are anabolic androgenic steroids (AAS), which copy the effects of the male hormone, testosterone. People use AAS to build muscle or increase strength. These types of steroids can be swallowed or injected into the muscles. AAS are different to corticosteroids, which are medically prescribed to treat conditions such as asthma. Corticosteroids copy the effects of the cortisol hormone and have no muscle-building or performance-enhancing effects.

Effects

Desired effects

The effects sought by people using AAS include:

- > increased lean muscle mass and strength
- > increased appetite, energy, motivation and confidence.

Harmful effects

AAS drugs affect people in different ways and with varied intensity. However, adverse effects will increase the longer the drug is used when people take several AAS drugs simultaneously (known as stacking) the risk and harms associated with use are increased.

Harmful effects of short-term use

- > water retention
- > acne
- > reduced sex drive
- > high blood pressure and cholesterol
- > heart disease, stroke and abnormal liver function.
- > diabetes
- > mood swings, irritability and aggression
- > fatigue
- > impulsive behaviour, risk-taking behaviour
- > depression
- > sleep problems
- > hallucinations (seeing, hearing or feeling things that don't exist)
- > growth stunting and premature bone ageing in adolescents.

Harmful effects of long-term use

In addition to the above effects, **in males**, long-term use of AAS can cause:

- > baldness
- > development of breast tissue
- > shrinking testicles and decreased sperm production.

In addition to the above effects, **in females**, long-term use of AAS can cause:

- > facial hair and a deeper voice
- > changes in the menstrual cycle
- > decreased breast size
- > enlarged clitoris.

Reducing the risk

It is always safer not to use drugs, but there are ways to reduce the risk:

- > It is safer not to inject because of the risk of infections and blood borne virus transmission such as hepatitis C, hepatitis B and HIV
- > If injecting always use clean injecting equipment, do not share any equipment including vials and dispose of all equipment safely. There are Clean Needle Programs throughout South Australia where sterile injecting equipment, health information and referrals can be accessed for free.
- > Visit www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/dassa for more information.
- > Be aware of and avoid counterfeit products.

Steroids and the law

In South Australia, steroids are classed as prescription drugs under section 4(1) of the Controlled Substances Act 1984. It is illegal to keep or use steroids unless they have been prescribed for you by a doctor for a recognised medical condition. It is also illegal to make, sell or give away steroids.

For more information about steroids and the law, visit www.sahealth.sa.gov.au > Health topics > Legal matters > Illicit drug laws.

Further information

Risks of using drugs - visit www.sahealth.sa.gov.au > Healthy Living > Is your health at risk? > The risks of using drugs.

Phone the Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS) on 1300 13 1340 between 8.30am and 10pm for confidential telephone counselling, information and referral.

For more information

Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)
Phone: 1300 13 1340
Confidential telephone counselling and information available between 8.30am and 10pm every day.
www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/dassa

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March 2017. DASSA:00498. Consumer reviewed.

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