

The Steroid-free Choice

Given all of the negative aspects of steroid use, it just doesn't make sense for anyone to condone steroid use or remain silent if they suspect a young person is using anabolic steroids. A number of measures can be taken by coaches and parents to deter steroid use. Consider some of these.

- Talk with your son, daughter or athlete about any frustrations they might have about how they look or how they are performing in their sport. Help them to establish healthy expectations of their body.
- Help young athletes to set realistic short-term and long-term goals. Keep sports fun and centered on the athlete's needs, not yours.
- Teach them not to trust gimmicks or quick-fix approaches to enhancing their bodies. Practice what you preach.
- Promote hard work, good nutrition and hydration, rest and good coaching as the tools of performance enhancement – not pills, powders and other dietary supplements.
- Restrict athletes' access to environments where steroid use might occur and to people who you believe are involved with steroid use.
- Monitor your son's or daughter's Internet usage and restrict their access to Web sites that advertise anabolic steroids or other performance-enhancing substances.
- As a coach, lead a team discussion about steroid abuse and ensure that your athletes understand your strong objection to steroids.
- Do not provide funds for or subscribe to publications such as muscle magazines that feature unrealistic images of men and women.
- Help the athlete access the advice of a registered dietician to develop a plan for weight gain or fat loss.

Additional Help to make the Right Choice

There are many resources available to young people to help them achieve their athletic and personal goals – resources geared specifically to athletes who want to succeed without using anabolic steroids. A listing of excellent online resources is available at www.nfhs.org.

References

"Hormone Abuse." The Hormone Foundation.

"Steroid Abuse by School Age Children." U.S. Department of Justice, Drug Enforcement Administration.

"Through a Child's Eyes ... A Parent's Guide to Improving Youth Sports." Citizenship Through Sports Alliance.

"Use of Performance-Enhancing Substances." American Academy of Pediatrics.

Special thanks to the Clell Wade Coaches Directory.

** This brochure, in a pdf format, can be downloaded from the NFHS Web site at www.nfhs.org.*



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 A close-up photograph of a person's arm flexing their bicep. The image is slightly blurred, focusing on the muscle. A white grid is overlaid on the image.

MAKE THE RIGHT CHOICE

It's not really winning if you cheat.

CHOICE ISN'T ALWAYS EASY. Young athletes make choices every day that can determine if they succeed or fail.

Athletes learn to make split-second decisions during competition that can immediately affect whether they win or lose. Over time, they learn that other choices – such as how hard they practice, what they eat and how much sleep they get – influence how well they perform on any given day. Decisions they make about the number of sports they play, who they work with as their coach and how they deal with injury and defeat have more long-term consequences. Many of these choices require adult guidance.

Another choice athletes must make involves the use of drugs to enhance athletic performance or appearance. And like all other choices, their decision to use drugs such as anabolic steroids will have both immediate and long-term consequences. All choices have consequences, yet those that affect their health require adult involvement. Adults have a responsibility to guide young people to make the right choices.

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 parents, coaches and other adults working with young athletes.

- 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.
- Coaches and parents can reduce steroid abuse by speaking out against their use.
- 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.

