

Fact Sheet

Anabolic Steroids

AKA: General: Steroids, anabolics, Anabolic and Androgenic Steroids (AAS), Performance Enhancing Drugs, *Juice, Roids*

Specific Products: Many hundreds with a Chemical Name, Product name, slang names: Testosterone Propionate, *Prop, Test. Enanthate, Test. Cypionate, Cyp, Sustanon, Sust, Nandrolone, Deca Durabolin, Deca, Primobolan, Primo, stanozolol, Winstrol, Winny, methandrostenolone, Dianabol, Trenbolone, Trenbol, Tren*

Other products: Adjunct compounds including Human Chorionic Gonadotrophins (HCG), Proviron, Clomid, Arimidex, Tamoxifen. These are used to help manage side effects of Anabolic Steroids or restore natural function at the end of usage.

SOURCE: A small number of anabolic steroids are legitimately prescribed in the UK. They may be used to treat wasting illnesses, dwarfism, gender reassignment and other conditions. Most of the Anabolic Steroids used in the UK are manufactured abroad and imported in the UK. Some are purchased on-line; others are purchased abroad by users and imported back in to the UK for personal use. The rest are illegally imported in to the UK and then sold on by suppliers, especially through Gym circles.

Quality: Some anabolic steroids are legitimately manufactured abroad under license; others are manufactured illicitly in underground labs. A large number of products are counterfeits of these products, which may not be sterile or of the same quality as more legitimate products.

APPEARANCE: Appearance varies according to products; products intended for injection will generally come in a glass ampoule or vial. These may have a snap-off top or a rubber stopper. Vials will generally have an adhesive label or be etched with details, and distributed in printed boxes. Some of the tablet forms may come in foil packaging, in printed boxes like "normal" medicines. However, other tablets may well be sold simply in plastic bags, with no additional packaging to assist with identification.

COSTS: Cost is hugely variable, depending on the type of steroid bought, the quality and the quantity. Single tablets are ineffective – so people will tend to use a combination of drugs over a period of time (a cycle.) A simple, short cycle that may only last a few weeks and using basic, easily sourced compounds, could cost only a couple of hundred pounds or less. Longer cycles using larger combinations could cost many times this. The cost of special diets and additional compounds can make things more expensive.

METHODS OF USE: Some Anabolic Steroids are sold in tablet form, and are intended for oral use. However, this route tends to be more liver-toxic and so is not

popular with some users. Other anabolic steroids come in oil-based preparations for intramuscular injection. They are exclusively used through this route and injection into a vein would be highly dangerous.

Injecting alcohol is quite unusual. Young people in the course of drugs experimentation sometimes do it. Otherwise it is users with long injecting habits who may undertake this painful activity.

PATTERNS OF USE: Depending on knowledge, experience, resources, and the latest "fad" doing the rounds, people will use various combinations of anabolic steroids over periods of time. Often combinations will be taken at the same time – "stacking," and over a number of weeks different substances will be used at different points – a "cycle." At the end of a cycle, experienced users will use additional compounds to restore normal function – "post-cycle treatment," then rest for a number of weeks or longer, before considering another cycle. For some people, cycles may be very infrequent, while others may undertake two or three cycles a year.

EFFECTS: Unlike most other drugs, Anabolic Steroids don't provide a sudden change of mental or physical state, so don't provide a "rush" in the classic sense. Most anabolic steroids work by providing a massive external source of the hormone "testosterone" or closely related compounds. This compound, at high doses, triggers processes of anabolism in the user – increased growth and development of muscles being the main sought-after effect. So they help users develop larger, stronger muscles more quickly. However, they do also provide a psychological lift – increased libido, drive, feelings of confidence and assertiveness.

HEALTH IMPLICATIONS: The use of Anabolic Steroids brings with it a large number of potential health risks, and these will vary according to the compounds being used, the quantity and route, and the age and gender of the user, and how many safety precautions they take.

Some Anabolic Steroids are 17-Alpha-Alkylated, which means that they have had their molecular function changed to reduce metabolism by the liver. However, this makes the compounds more liver toxic and so heavy or sustained use of 17AA compounds increases the risk of serious liver damage.

In male users, the use of testosterone-based compounds can in turn lead to interruption of the users own testosterone production. This can mean that when use of anabolic steroids stops, the person has low levels of testosterone, and may experience testicular atrophy, reduced libido, impotence, depression and loss of muscular development.

Conversely, male users using some anabolic steroids may experience symptoms of gynecomastia – development of breast tissue – as the excess of testosterone in the body

is converted in to the hormone oestrogen. Through the careful use of post cycle treatment and oestrogen-inhibitors, these risks can be reduced.

More generally, male users may be at risk of accelerated male-pattern balding, acne, water retention, kidney problems, high blood pressure, heart problems, damage to joints or ligaments, and increased aggression or mood swings.

Women who use anabolic steroids may experience some distinct and different problems including development of facial or chest hair, lowering of the voice, changes to jaw line and throat, reduction in breast tissue, over-development of the clitoris (clitoral hypertrophy), reduced or absent periods.

Young people who use steroids may experience premature sealing of the long bones which could result in restricted height. It may also interfere with the completion of pubescent development.

LEGAL STATUS: Class C: Schedule 4ii. Most anabolics are in this unusual position. This makes it a criminal offence to supply anabolic steroids without authority and this offence carries a maximum of 14 years. But no authority is required to possess anabolic steroids so no offence is committed for personal possession of anabolics in medical form.

OTHER INFORMATION: Thanks in part to the internet and also due to the social "norms" about male physique, there has been a significant increase in Anabolic Steroid use in the UK. However, as users do not typically present to addiction services or come through criminal justice routes they are probably under-represented at services. Some steroid injectors will use needle exchange services, but tend to want specific combinations of equipment and out of hours service so may under-use pharmacy exchanges or generic provision.

Steroid use has often been associated with athletics and competitive body builders. Increasingly, it is being used by people outside of these settings, including young people wanting to "bulk up," people in jobs where size and strength is helpful such as doorstaff, and men who feel the need to look more muscled.

Some steroid use may stem from underlying psychological issues such as body dysmorphia. Steroid use can lead to dependency – the elevation of performance and mood during use, the crash and loss of bulk afterwards, routine, ritual, companionship and lifestyle that comes with steroid use and training can make it a difficult habit to break.

It is likely that, over the next few years, anabolic steroids will be one of the most significant issues that drugs agencies will need to address.