PEDIATRIC AFFILIATES
OF HAMPTON ROADS

200 GRAYSON ROAD, SUITE 101
VIRGINIA BEACH, VIRGINIA 23462
(757) 473-3200
(757) 473.0459 (FAX)
www.doc4kids.com

ANABOLIC STEROIDS
From: KidsHealth.org

We have all heard stories about athletes and steroids which seem to pop up regularly in the news. Some professional baseball players, cyclists, and track stars have been accused of — and in some cases have admitted to — using steroids to give them an edge competitively.

And steroid use has trickled down to younger athletes too, who face fierce pressure to be stronger and faster, and to make it to college and professional leagues. Some research has shown that 5% of teen boys and 2.5% of teen girls have used some form of anabolic steroids.

Steroids promise bold results, but there is little proof that they deliver any such benefits. Extensive research, however, shows how they can harm developing kids — with some of these ill effects not likely to turn up until years later. And steroids are illegal, too.

It's important to understand the facts about steroids, their side effects, and what can drive kids to try them. Being aware of the kinds of pressures kids deal with in sports can help you make sure that your child isn't at risk.

What Are Steroids?

Drugs commonly referred to as "steroids" are classified as **anabolic** (or **anabolic-androgenic**) and **corticosteroids**. Corticosteroids, such as cortisone, are drugs that doctors typically prescribe to help control inflammation in the body. They're often used to help control conditions like asthma and lupus. They're **not** the same as the anabolic steroids that receive so much media attention for their use by some athletes and bodybuilders.

Anabolic steroids are synthetic hormones that can boost the body's ability to produce muscle and prevent muscle breakdown. Some athletes take steroids in

the hopes that they will improve their ability to run faster, hit farther, lift heavier weights, jump higher, or have more endurance. In the United States, it is against the law to use anabolic steroids without a prescription.

Androstenedione, or "andro," is a kind of anabolic steroid taken by athletes who want to build muscle. But research suggests that andro taken in large doses every day can significantly increase levels of testosterone, which can lead to a number of health problems.

How Do Anabolic Steroids Work?

Anabolic steroids are drugs that resemble the chemical structure of the body's natural sex hormone **testosterone**, which is made naturally by the body. Testosterone directs the body to produce or enhance male characteristics such as increased muscle mass, facial hair growth, and deepening of the voice, and is an important part of male development during puberty.

When anabolic steroids increase the levels of testosterone in the blood, they stimulate muscle tissue in the body to grow larger and stronger. However, the effects of too much testosterone circulating in the body can be harmful over time.

Dangers of Anabolic Steroids

Steroids are dangerous for two reasons: they are illegal, and they can damage a person's health, especially if used in large doses over time. Also, the health problems caused by steroids may not appear until years after the steroids are taken.

Although they might help build muscle, steroids can produce very serious side effects. Using steroids for a long time can negatively affect the reproductive system. In males, steroids can lead to impotence, a reduction in the amount of sperm produced in the testicles, and even reduced testicle size.

Females who use steroids may have problems with their menstrual cycles because steroids can disrupt the maturation and release of eggs from the ovaries. This disruption can cause long-term problems with fertility.

Steroids taken for an extended period of time also can cause:

- stunted growth in teens (by causing bones to mature too fast and stop growing at an early age)
- liver tumors
- abnormal enlargement of the heart muscles
- violent, aggressive behavior and mood swings
- blood lipid abnormalities that contribute to heart disease

- acne (or a worsening of acne)
- increased breast growth in males, especially teens
- irreversible stretch marks
- a heightened tendency for hair loss and male-pattern baldness
- muscle aches

Teen girls and women risk these additional side effects:

- male-type facial and body hair growth and male-pattern baldness
- deepening of the voice

enlargement of the clitoris

Drug Testing

In addition to the health risks, kids who use steroids without prescription are breaking the law. Drug testing for all athletes has become more prevalent, and those who fail a drug test for steroids can face legal consequences, including jail time, monetary fines, exclusion from an event or team, or forfeiture of trophies or medals.

Andro use has been banned by many sports organizations, including the International Olympic Committee, the National Football League, the National Basketball Association, the National Collegiate Athletic Association, the Association of Tennis Professionals, and most high school athletic associations.

Talking to Kids About Steroids

Many pressures may drive young athletes to experiment with steroids. Although most athletes exercise hard, eat properly, and take care of their bodies to maintain optimal fitness and performance levels, athletic competition and the desire to look physically toned and fit can be fierce.

Help kids handle these pressures by:

- discussing healthy competition with them
- talking about the coaches' and team members' attitudes toward steroids
- knowing what kind of sports environments they compete in
- encouraging them to prepare mentally and physically for competition by eating well and getting enough rest

If you suspect your child is using steroids, watch for these warning signs:

- exaggerated mood swings
- worsening acne
- unusually greasy skin with stretch marks
- a sudden increase in muscle size
-

If you see any of these signs in your child, talk with your doctor. Steroids may give kids the sense that they're stronger and more athletic, but the consequences

are too dangerous to risk. Help kids stay away from steroids by encouraging healthy eating and fitness habits that will help them feel well prepared for competition.

When steroid use among pro athletes is in the news, use that as a launching point to discuss the issue, making sure your child understands the health risks, the possibility of legal trouble, and the concept that using steroids is cheating.

Anabolic Steroids
Rev.: 6/12/15