

A detailed appraisal of the harmful effects of different substances can be found in the DoH document: 'Dangerousness of Drugs' (2001), available from the DoH website: www.doh.gov.uk/drugs/pdfs/dangerousness.pdf

PHYSICAL COMPLICATIONS OF INJECTING DRUG MISUSE

INFECTIOUS

- Infective endocarditis
- Pneumonia
- Cellulitis
- Cutaneous abscess
- Gas gangrene
- Infected false aneurysm
- Osteomyelitis
- Septic arthritis
- Sexually transmitted diseases
- Tuberculosis
- Tetanus
- Malaria
- HIV infection
- Hepatitis viruses A to G

HEPATIC

- Acute hepatitis
- Fulminant hepatic failure
- Chronic hepatitis
- Cirrhosis

RENAL

- Nephrotic syndrome
- Glomerulonephritis
- Renal failure

CARDIOVASCULAR

- Arrhythmia
- Mycotic aneurysm
- Thrombophlebitis

PULMONARY

- Pulmonary oedema
- Pneumothorax
- Pneumomediastinum
- Pulmonary fibrosis
- Pulmonary hypertension

GASTROINTESTINAL

- Motility disorders
- Constipation

NEUROMUSCULAR

- Stroke
- Epidural abscess
- Subdural abscess
- Brain abscess
- Transverse myelitis
- Anoxic encephalopathy
- Peripheral neuropathy
- Horner's syndrome
- Myositis

MISCELLANEOUS

- Overdose
- Allergic reaction
- Pyrogenic reaction
- Trauma
- Needle embolus
- Necrotising angitis
- Amenorrhoea
- Hormonal abnormalities
- Thrombocytopenia

IMMUNOLOGIC ABNORMALITIES (IN HIV NEGATIVE PARENTERAL SUBSTANCE MISUSERS)

- Generalised lymphadenopathy
- Elevated serum IgG & IgM
- False positive serologic tests
- Lymphocytosis

ANABOLIC STEROIDS

These modified steroids are known as anabolic steroids, anabolic meaning to chemically build up. Only two anabolic steroids are available on prescription in the U.K. these being nandrolone and stanozol, marketed as Durabolin and DecaDurabolin and Stromba respectively. Some illicit anabolic steroids are, however, imported from abroad, and are therefore likely to have other names.

EFFECTS

Anabolic steroids increase the retention of nitrogen by the body, allowing this to be used to build muscle. An athlete's strength will not be increased unless this is also combined with intensive training and a special high protein high calorie diet. Steroids also aid the production of red blood cells, which carry oxygen around the body, which has led to the belief that they might be helpful in increasing endurance. There is however no evidence to support this. It should be noted that traces of anabolic steroids can be detected in the urine for an average of 3–6 months after taking the drug, although this can be considerably longer.

SIDE EFFECTS

Because anabolic steroids are modelled on male hormones they can have a masculinising effect on the body. Women may have an increase in body hair, a deepening of the voice, loss of head hair, enlargement of the clitoris and a decrease in breast size. Men may suffer from a decrease in sperm production and testes size and the development of breast tissue gynaecomastia. Other effects include raised cholesterol levels and steroids have the potential to cause hypertension because of their water retaining properties. Many athletes welcome the increased aggression that has been reported as a side effect, as they feel it helps them to train harder for longer. Unwanted side effects may be greater when steroids are taken in high doses, or different combinations of steroids are used together (stacking). Many steroids on sale are counterfeit or for veterinary use and therefore are of unknown strength. Injectables may be contaminated with bacteria.

Liver function tests can show abnormalities during a steroid using period, but usually return to normal once the drug is stopped. Drug induced jaundice can be caused by temporarily impaired excretory function.