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Steroids are similar to hormones produced in the body

Steroids, sometimes referred to as roids, juice, hype, weight trainers, gym candy or pumpers, are the same as, or similar to, certain hormones in the body. The body produces steroids naturally to support such functions as fighting stress and promoting growth and pubertal development.

Anabolic steroids are artificially produced hormones that are the same as, or similar to, androgens, the male-type sex hormones in the body. The most powerful androgen is testosterone.

Although testosterone is mainly a mature male hormone, girls' bodies produce smaller amounts of it as well. Testosterone promotes masculine traits that guys develop during puberty, such as deepening of the voice and the growth of body hair.

Testosterone levels also can affect how aggressive a person is and how much sex drive he or she has. Athletes sometimes take anabolic steroids because of their testosterone-like effects, such as increasing muscle mass and strength. Steroids can be taken in the form of pills, powders or injections.

Another group of anabolic steroids, sometimes called steroidal supplements, contain dehydroepiandrosterone (DHEA) and/or androstenedione (also known as andro). Steroidal supplements are often sold at health food stores or gyms.

The effects of steroidal supplements aren't well known, but it's thought that, when taken in large doses, they cause effects similar to stronger anabolic steroids like testosterone.



cris lovington

- prevention center

Here's what is known: companies that manufacture steroidal supplements often make claims that are false, and very little is known about the long-term effects on the body of some of these substances.

The term "steroids" is also used to describe some types of non-anabolic steroids, such as cortisone, which have other medical uses and are available by prescription to treat medical problems like asthma or arthritis. These steroid medications do not have the male hormone effects of androgens.

Anabolic steroids stimulate muscle tissue to grow and "bulk up" in response to training by mimicking the effect of naturally produced testosterone on the body. Steroids have become popular because they

may improve endurance, strength, and muscle mass. But research has not shown that they improve skill, agility, or performance.

Anabolic steroids cause many different types of problems. Less serious side effects include acne, oily hair, purple or red spots on the body, swelling of the legs and feet, and persistent bad breath.

Some of the more serious or long-lasting side effects are premature balding; mood swings, including anger, aggression and depression; seeing or hearing things that aren't there (hallucinations); and extreme feelings of mistrust or fear (paranoia)

Specific risks for girls associated with anabolic steroids include increased facial hair growth; development of masculine traits, such as deepening of the voice; and loss of feminine body characteristics, such as shrinking of the breasts and men-

strual cycle changes.

Specific risks for guys include testicular shrinkage, pain when urinating, breast development, impotence (inability to get an erection) and sterility (inability to have children).

Steroids can also have serious psychological side effects. Some users become aggressive or combative, developing "roid rage," extreme, uncontrolled bouts of anger caused by long-term steroid use.

My next column will explain other implications of steroid use and web sites to find more about steroids and other drugs.

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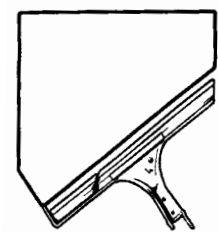
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