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Review article

## Medical Issues Associated with Anabolic Steroid Use: Are They Exaggerated?

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### ABSTRACT

For the past 50 years anabolic steroids have been at the forefront of the controversy surrounding performance enhancing drugs. For almost half of this time no attempt was made by sports governing bodies to control its use, and only recently have all of the major sports governing bodies in North America agreed to ban from competition and punish athletes who test positive for anabolic steroids. These punitive measures were developed with the primary concern for promotion of fair play and eliminating potential health risks associated with androgenic-anabolic steroids. Yet, controversy exists whether these testing programs deter anabolic steroid use. Although the scope of this paper does not focus on the effectiveness of testing, or the issue of fair play, it is of interest to understand why many athletes underestimate the health risks associated from these drugs. What creates further curiosity is the seemingly well-publicized health hazards that the medical community has depicted concerning anabolic steroid abuse. Is there something that the athletes know, or are they simply naive regarding the dangers? The focus of this review is to provide a brief history of anabolic steroid use in North America, the prevalence of its use in both athletic and recreational populations and its efficacy. Primary discussion will focus on health issues associated with anabolic steroid use with an examination of the contrasting views held between the medical community and the athletes that are using these ergogenic drugs. Existing data suggest that in certain circumstances the medical risk

associated with anabolic steroid use may have been somewhat exaggerated, possibly to dissuade use in athletes.

**Key words:** Androgens, ergogenic aids, athletes, sport supplements, performance enhancing drugs

### Key Points

- For many years the scientific and medical communities depicted a lack of efficacy and serious adverse effects from anabolic steroid use.
- Clinical case studies continue to link anabolic steroid administration with myocardial infarct, suicide, and cancer, evidence to support a cause and effect relationship is lacking.
- It may be other contributing factors (i.e. genetic predisposition, diet, etc.) that play a substantial role and potentiate the harmful effects from anabolic steroids.

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