

Steroids & the Athlete

An Insight Into the Side-Effect Profiles

By Randy Martin, M.D.

Steroids have been used by a wide range of athletes over the years, usually unsupervised by physicians, usually without quality control, usually without the athlete truly knowing what he/she is taking. Each athlete is ultimately responsible for their own body and the choices they make. Every athlete would like to enhance their performance, whether it is by searching for the "perfect" conditioning regimen, whether it is by perfecting a particular athletic skill, or by finding the "magic pill." Some choices lead to an increase in strength and quickness, other choices lead to a deterioration in performance and even death. I would like to take this opportunity to review some of the issues related to the use of steroids.

The information available to athletes concerning steroids is more often than not wrong and amplified by misinformation shared between athletes, trainers, magazines, underground publications, and the Internet. In addition, the combination of various medications used by some athletes have never been researched by the medical community in a methodical, controlled manner.

It is difficult to determine exactly how many athletes utilize steroids. In one study published in 1993, 6 percent of males and 2 percent of females aged 13 to 17 years reported using steroids without a physician prescription. In a study out of England, Scotland, and Wales published in 1997, 9 percent of high school males and 2 percent of females reported using steroids. In my medical experience, the use of steroids among athletes has been increasing.

Virtually all steroids created for human or veterinary use have been taken by athletes. Steroids prior to the age of 14 years and 15 percent prior to 10 years of age.

Information is not available for these medications. The potential side-effect profiles of these medications are documented and the medications can cause short-term and long-term problems.

Editor's Note: Dr. Randy Martin is a physician in the greater Sacramento, CA area, who has been active in the area as a coach, tournament director, and photographer.