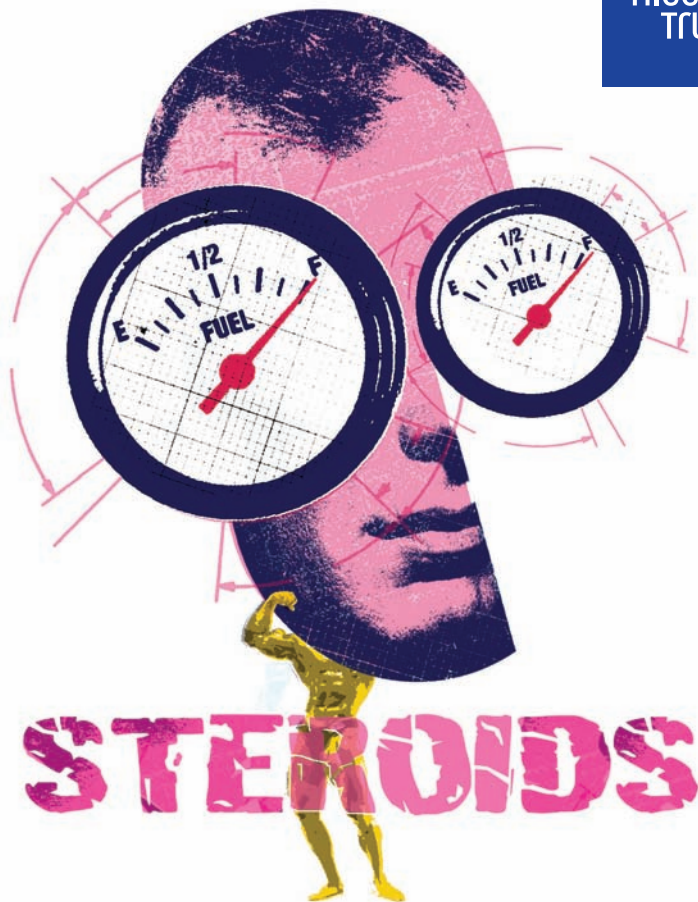


Gay men, sex and drugs

terrence
HIGGINS
TRUST



WHAT'S THE SCORE?

Steroids are also known as: anabolic steroids, roids, gear, sauce or juice (eg, 'on the juice'). They're made from the male hormone testosterone and help men build muscle - but only if they work out too.

TAKING STEROIDS

Steroids come as pills - or a liquid that's injected into your backside (buttock), but never into a vein because this can kill. Often steroids are taken in 'cycles' (weeks on, followed by weeks off, then on again, etc.) and by 'stacking' (taking several types of steroids to strengthen their effects).

HIGHS AND LOWS

Steroids help a man grow muscles bigger than he could if he trained without them.

Big muscles can make him feel more confident and give him a buzz from feeling lusted after, accepted and part of a group of other muscled men.

Nearly all users experience some side effects. These can be: acne (especially on the back), trouble sleeping, gut problems, hair loss (which doesn't grow back), growth of breast tissue ('bitch tits'), testicles getting smaller, water retention, high blood pressure (with a risk of stroke), raised cholesterol (fat in the blood), liver and heart damage, and prostate problems.

There can be mood changes, irritability and aggression (roid rage). Coming off them can lead to depression, and for some men possibly thoughts of suicide.

Injecting steroids carries its own health risks (skin abscesses or infections). Sharing injecting equipment spreads serious infections like HIV and hepatitis C.

A LONG TERM RELATIONSHIP?

Serious health problems are more likely the longer you take steroids and the bigger the dose.

Using them can feed a body disorder where men see themselves as smaller than they really are and become obsessed about their size.

In the short term roids might seem to help with low self-esteem but long term can make insecurities worse.

STEROIDS WITH OTHER DRUGS

HIV drugs - because steroids and some HIV drugs both raise levels of cholesterol (fat in the blood), if you're being treated for HIV you should be careful about using muscle-building drugs. A doctor should check your cholesterol levels. Taking steroids when on HIV drugs puts extra strain on your liver.

If you're on some HIV meds they can cause raised levels of steroids in the blood, making side effects more likely. Ask your HIV doctor for advice.

E, speed, crystal meth and cocaine - these chems wipe out your energy levels and interfere with gym work outs - and make you lose weight when you're trying to bulk up.

Taking any drug while using steroids puts extra strain on your liver.

As steroids can affect your mood it may be better while you're on a course of steroids to avoid other drugs that change your mental state.

USEFUL TO KNOW

Illegally sold steroids can be contaminated, diluted, fake or made for use with animals.

Before starting steroids and while you're on them it's a good idea to have your heart, liver and kidney function and cholesterol levels monitored.

Drinking lots of water (up to 3 litres a day) is important to clear from the body waste products caused by steroids.

Steroids should be avoided if you have conditions like diabetes, high blood pressure, glaucoma (an eye condition), mental health problems or anything wrong with your heart.

Steroids can stunt growth, so men under 24 are advised not to use them.

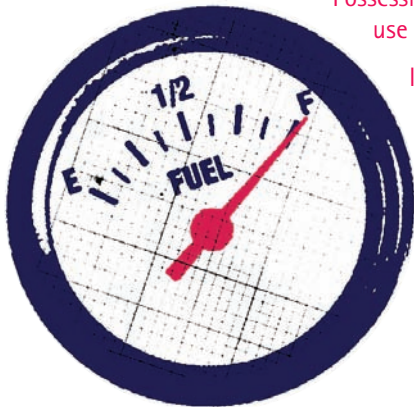
THE LAW

Steroids are prescription-only drugs controlled by the Medicines Act. They're also Class C drugs under the Misuse of Drugs Act.

Possession of steroids for personal use isn't illegal in the UK.

Intending to supply to others including mates is against the law and can mean up to 14 years in prison and/or an unlimited fine.

Possession of steroids is illegal in many other countries.



SEX ON STEROIDS

Steroids can make someone feel more sexually confident and boost sex drive (and as a result they might be more likely to risk getting or passing on HIV).

But steroids can also weaken a man's sex drive and cause erection problems. Balls may shrink as the body no longer needs to make its own testosterone. Dick size isn't affected.



MORE INFO

In gear

In gear is a gay man's guide to steroids, a leaflet from Camden PCT Good Sexual Health Team available in gay venues or for a copy email goodsexualhealthteam@camdenpct.nhs.uk

If you'd like to talk to someone with lots of experience of alcohol and drug-related issues, there's:

One-2-One counselling with a drugs counsellor at **Terrence Higgins Trust's** London offices. It's **free** of charge and to see if this would be useful for you, call our **Wellbeing Service** on **0207 812 1777**.

Or you can ask one of the **LADS** outreach team (identifiable in venues and cruising areas by their LADS stand, t-shirts and ID badges) about speaking to our drugs worker.

Also, check out www.tht.org.uk / **DRUG F*CKED**

Antidote

A London service gay and bisexual men concerned about their alcohol or drug use can make use of, with weekly drop-in, one-to-one counselling, support groups and more. Call **020 7287 8743** or go to www.thehungerford.org/antidote.asp

Talk To Frank

Information and support around alcohol and drug use. Call the 24 hour helpline on **0800 77 66 00** or contact by email, details from their website. Also, check out the 'need help' section of the site, www.talktofrank.com