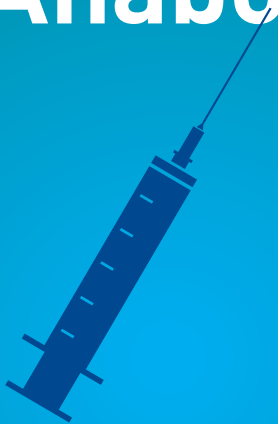


Anabolic Steroids

ROIDS/SLOP/JUICE/SAUCE



Whatever you're
calling it, you
should know the
**BASIC FACTS ON
SAFER INJECTING**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

If you are using or are planning to use steroids, getting the facts will help you lower the risk of hurting yourself or damaging your health. This booklet has information on safer steroid use, safer injecting, equipment you will need, and the possible side effects associated with using steroids. It also has information on what you need to know about HIV and hepatitis if you are injecting steroids.

Sometimes things can go wrong if you share injection equipment, use contaminated steroids, or don't inject properly. You can reduce your risks by following the safer injection and harm reduction tips given in this booklet.

Five Messages for Steroid Users:

- › Use your own sterile equipment each time you inject.
- › Plan ahead. Get needles and safer injecting supplies from your local needle and syringe program or pharmacy.
- › Inject properly and in the right areas.
- › Dispose of needles safely.
- › Get regular medical checkups and know the possible side effects to look for.

There are laws regarding performance-enhancing drugs. In some cases, steroids are prescribed by a physician for certain medical conditions. This booklet does not provide information about the law on steroids in Canada.

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What are Anabolic Steroids?

Anabolic steroids are synthetic drugs developed to mimic (have the same effect on the body as) the natural hormones testosterone and dihydrotestosterone. These hormones increase the muscle mass of the body. Testosterone is also the hormone that naturally causes changes in facial hair, deepening of the voice, sex drive, and development of the penis and testicles.

Anabolic steroids cause muscle building that increases strength and muscle bulk. There are many different types and brands, and they can be taken in pill form or through injections. Usually, there is a period of use (cycle) followed by a period of no use to give the body time to adjust and heal. The lengths of these cycles and rest periods depend on the drug, the dose and how your body reacts.

People choose to take anabolic steroids for lots of different reasons, such as:

- › increasing strength and muscle mass
- › increasing energy
- › decreasing body fat
- › improving sporting performance
- › improving body image
- › peer pressure

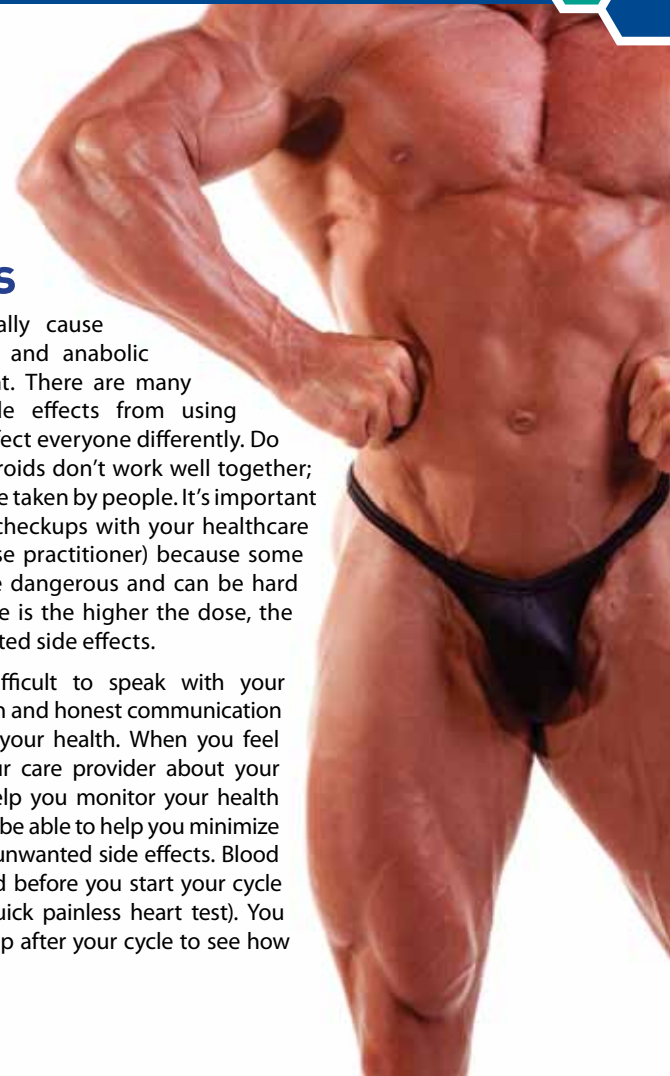
Dependence

Some people may become psychologically dependent on steroids and can go through withdrawal when they stop taking them. Withdrawal symptoms include mood swings, low sex drive, depression, nausea, headaches, sweating, tiredness and anxiety. If you are worried you may be becoming dependent on steroids, talk openly to a healthcare provider.

Side Effects

All drugs can potentially cause unwanted side effects, and anabolic steroids are no different. There are many possible unwanted side effects from using steroids and they can affect everyone differently. Do your research; some steroids don't work well together; others are not made to be taken by people. It's important to get regular medical checkups with your healthcare provider (doctor or nurse practitioner) because some of these side effects are dangerous and can be hard to spot. The general rule is the higher the dose, the higher the risk of unwanted side effects.

Although it can be difficult to speak with your healthcare provider, open and honest communication is an important part of your health. When you feel comfortable, talk to your care provider about your steroid use. They can help you monitor your health during your use and may be able to help you minimize or manage some of the unwanted side effects. Blood work should be collected before you start your cycle along with an ECG (a quick painless heart test). You should also get a checkup after your cycle to see how your body is coping.



Possible Unwanted Side Effects

Body Changes

- › hair loss
- › acne on your face, back, chest and shoulders
- › body rash
- › increased body hair
- › breast development (in men)
- › shrinking of testicles

Mood Changes

- › aggression
- › mood swings or depression
- › insomnia (trouble sleeping)
- › paranoia

Health Risks

- › heart problems and palpitations (changes in your heartbeat)
- › jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes) and liver damage/cancer
- › decreased sex drive, decreased fertility or lower sperm count
- › impotence (difficulty keeping an erection) or prostate cancer
- › high blood pressure, blood clots or stroke
- › sodium and water retention
- › headaches
- › muscle and tendon injuries
- › kidney damage

Unwanted side effects are more common in women because the female body naturally produces a lower amount of testosterone than the male body does. Some side effects are also unique to women, including deepening of the voice, enlargement of the clitoris, drying of the vagina, and changes to the menstrual cycle.

These risks can be made worse if you already have a medical condition or a mental health issue, use street drugs, smoke cigarettes or drink alcohol.



Know Your Stuff

Any steroids bought online or on the street (underground market) are not quality controlled. There is no guarantee that what is on the label is actually in the container. Never buy loose tablets or ampoules/vials.

What to look for:

- › packaging is sealed and intact
- › print on the labels is the same and clear on all ampoules/vials
- › expiry date has not been exceeded (if they've expired or there isn't an expiry date don't use them)
- › all ampoules/vials in the pack should have the same lot number and the same expiry dates
- › rubber stopper and metal covering are secure
- › liquid in the ampoules/vials is clear and there are no floating bits
- › all the ampoules/vials look the same and have the same amount of liquid in them

If anything looks suspicious

**THINK
TWICE**



Equipment

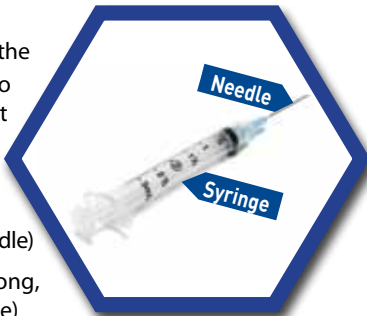
- ▶ New sterile equipment needs to be used for each injection.
- ▶ Cleaning equipment that has already been used will not kill all of the bacteria or viruses that may be inside.
- ▶ Injection equipment should NOT be shared, as there is a high risk of hepatitis C and HIV transmission.

What you need

1. A sterile syringe a 2 – 3 ml syringe

2. Sterile Needles two needles: one to draw up the solution from the vial or ampoule and another to inject the drug into your muscle -- you don't want to use the same needle twice because it can get dull

- an 18 – 23 gauge needle that is 1 to 1½ inches long, to draw up the drug (the “drawing up” needle)
- a 21 – 25 gauge needle that is 1 to 1½ inches long, to inject into the muscle (the “injecting” needle)



TIPS

- ▶ You should not inject more than 2 ml of fluid into a muscle at one time. Injecting more than 2 ml affects how the drug is absorbed AND increases your risk of developing abscesses.
- ▶ The thickness of the needle is measured in gauges (the smaller the gauge the thicker the needle). The needle must be THICK enough for the drug to pass through (oil-based steroids need a thicker needle) and LONG enough to reach into your muscle (if injecting in the buttock you will need a longer needle).

3. Alcohol swabs to clean the injection site and the stoppers of multi-dose vials.



4. A biohazard container to put used needles and equipment in. This will prevent anyone else from getting hurt accidentally. If you do not have a biohazard container, any hard plastic container with a lid, like a pop bottle or laundry detergent bottle, will work.



Getting Ready

Things can go wrong when you inject incorrectly, share injection equipment, or use contaminated drugs. You can reduce your risk by following the safer injection and harm reduction tips given in this booklet.

Find a clean spot to lay out all your equipment. Wash your hands well with soap and water before handling any injection equipment.

Drawing up from an ampoule or a vial

- ▶ Allow steroids that need to be refrigerated to warm up to room temperature before injecting. This helps reduce the shock to the muscle when you inject and improves absorption of the steroid into the body.
- ▶ Attach a sterile “drawing-up” needle to a sterile syringe.

▶ AMPOULE

- Open the ampoule. Be careful not to cut yourself.
- Insert the needle and draw back the plunger until the amount of drug you want is in the syringe.

▶ VIAL

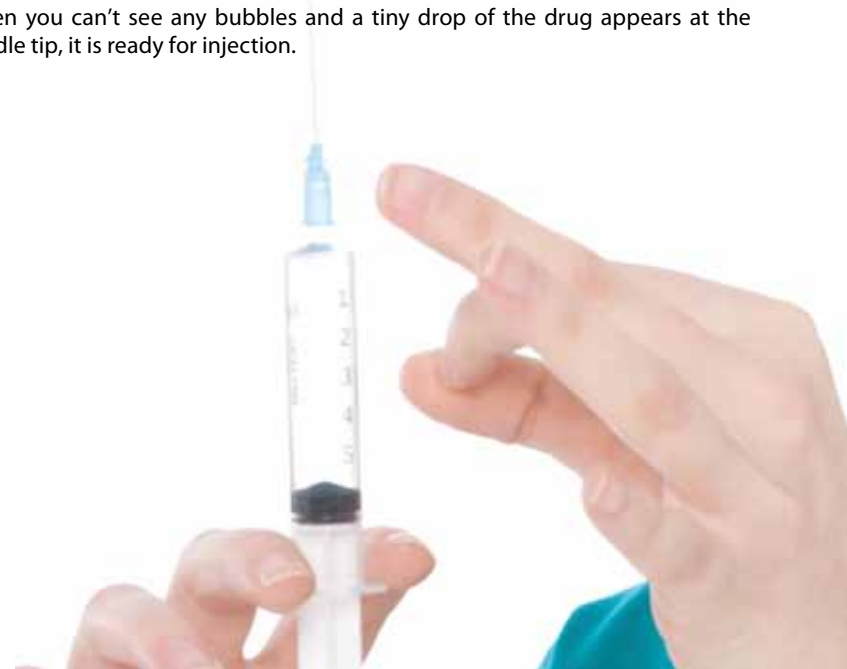
- Open the vial.
- Clean the rubber stopper with an alcohol swab.
- Push the needle through the rubber stopper and inject a small amount of air into the vial to regulate the pressure. This makes it easier to draw up the drug into the syringe.
- Draw the plunger back until the amount of drug you want is in the syringe.



- ▶ When using two or more substances, make sure you don't accidentally mix the drugs from one bottle to another.
- ▶ Remove the drawing-up needle from the syringe and put it in your biohazard container.
- ▶ Attach your new sterile injecting needle to the syringe. Leave the cap on the needle until you are ready to inject.

Before Injecting

- ▶ Get rid of any air bubbles in the syringe before injecting. Hold the syringe pointing upward, flick the barrel to move any bubbles to the top, and then push the plunger slowly to get rid of any air.
- ▶ When you can't see any bubbles and a tiny drop of the drug appears at the needle tip, it is ready for injection.

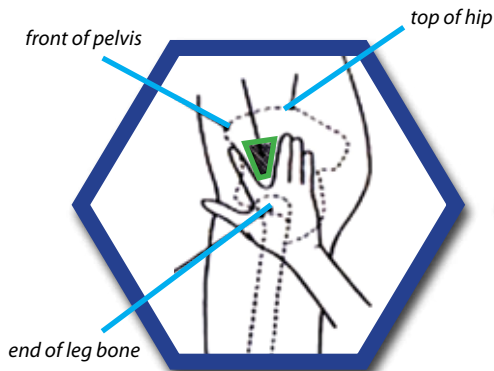


Where to inject?

- ▶ Anabolic steroids should only be injected into a muscle, never a vein. The largest muscles (buttock, hip and thigh) are the best and safest places to inject.
- ▶ Remember to rotate your injection sites to avoid tissue damage in one area. If you feel a hard lump in your muscle, use a different injection site.
- ▶ If you are not sure where to inject or if you can't reach, ask your care provider to show you how and where to inject.
- ▶ Since steroids work throughout the body and not just where they are injected, you don't need to target specific muscles with injections.

The Hip (Ventrogluteal)

This is the safest muscle for injection because there are no major nerves or blood vessels in the area. It can be a little tricky to find on your own body, so it's best to have a healthcare provider or friend help you locate the site for the first few times. Place the palm of the opposite hand (right hand for left hip, left hand for right hip) over the end of your thigh bone (femur) and your index finger on the bony part at the front of your pelvis. Then spread the middle finger out towards the top of your hip bone; the injection site is in the 'V' your fingers make.



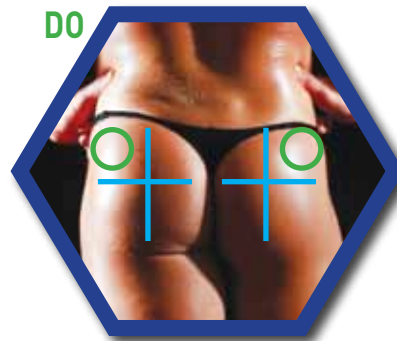
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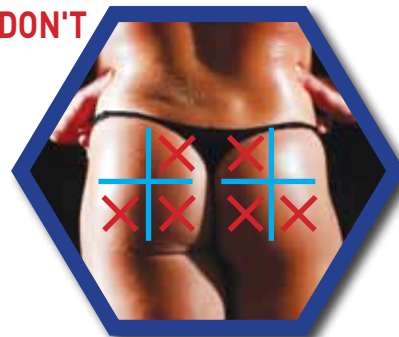
The Butt

This is another large muscle that is good for injection. Divide the buttock into four blocks, inject in the upper outer block in either the left or right buttock.

DO



DON'T



Sciatic Nerve Path

DON'T



The sciatic nerve is located in the centre of each buttock (shown in yellow). Hitting the sciatic nerve is very painful and can cause permanent nerve damage.

The Thigh

Inject in the vastus lateralis (the middle outer muscle) of either thigh.

DO



The Shoulder

Find the tip of your shoulder bone and inject three fingers down. This is not the best injection site because it is a smaller muscle. Injecting here can cause more damage and pain.

DO



Steps for safer injecting

- ▶ Use a new alcohol swab to clean your injection site area. Rub the area for 30 seconds.
- ▶ Remove the plastic cap from the needle. The needle should not touch anything before injection.
- ▶ Hold the syringe like a dart and slightly spread the skin of the injection site using your other hand.
- ▶ With a quick movement, push the needle through the skin and into the muscle at a 90 degree angle. Only insert three-quarters of the needle so it can be removed more easily if the needle breaks.
- ▶ Pull the plunger back a little bit; if blood is drawn into the syringe, remove the needle quickly, and apply pressure for a minute using a cotton ball. Discard this needle in your biohazard container and start preparing a new injection and using a different site.
- ▶ If no blood is drawn into the syringe, continue with injection by slowly pushing the plunger to minimize tissue damage.
- ▶ After injecting, remove the needle quickly and apply pressure for a minute with a cotton ball where the needle was injected.

After Injecting

- ▶ A small amount of bleeding from where the needle broke the skin is normal. You may also have a bit of swelling, redness, pain, itching or burning at the injection site. These symptoms should go away in one or two days. If the site is still red and hot after two days, talk to your healthcare provider right away.
- ▶ Wash your hands well with soap and water.
- ▶ Gently massage the injection site to help distribute the steroid.
- ▶ **Put needles, syringes and empty ampoules/vials in a biohazard container. Return the biohazard container to your local needle and syringe program once the container is about three-quarters full.**

Risks

Abscesses

An abscess is an infection at the injection site. Abscesses can be caused by bacteria that get under the skin when the site isn't cleaned before injecting or from reusing injection equipment. They can also be caused by a steroid that is not fully absorbed from the injection site. This can happen when you inject too much at one time or don't insert the needle far enough into the muscle. When this happens, the drug pools in the muscle and can break down the tissue, causing an infection. Symptoms of an abscess are an injection site that is red, hot, painful/burning; scarring or a hard lump at the site; or a fever. You should see a healthcare provider if you have any of these symptoms. Many abscesses need special treatment or antibiotics. If an abscess is not treated, a more serious blood infection can occur.

Pain or spasm

Pain or spasm can be caused by not injecting in the right place or using the same injection site over and over. Pain can be a sign of damage to a muscle, tendon or ligament. Lasting muscle pain or spasm can end up affecting how well your muscle works. Remember to rotate sites and take the time to find the right place each time you inject.

Hitting a nerve

If you hit a nerve, it'll be painful. If this happens, remove the needle. Severe nerve damage can happen, which could be permanent and which could affect your ability to move (paralysis).

Bleeding that won't stop

Injecting into a blood vessel can lead to bleeding inside the muscle and visible bruising. This can cause muscle pain and stiffness. Always remember to make sure your needle is not in a blood vessel before injecting (see Injecting Steps, page 13). Some medications, like blood thinners, increase the risk of serious bleeding after injecting.

Hepatitis

Hepatitis is a virus that affects the liver. It can cause inflammation (swelling) and depending on the type of hepatitis (Hep), over time, it could lead to scarring and liver damage.

Hep A, Hep B and Hep C are the three most common types of hepatitis in Canada.

Hepatitis A

There is no risk of Hep A from steroid use. Hep A is spread through oral contact with the feces (poo) of a person with hepatitis A and can be in food or water. It is possible to get hepatitis A from oral-anal sex (rimming).

Hepatitis B

There is a risk of Hep B from steroid use. Hepatitis B is spread by contact with infected blood. It can also be spread by other body fluids like semen (including pre-cum), vaginal fluids, saliva (spit) and breast milk. Most people can fight Hep B, but there are medicines to help control the virus, too. Hepatitis B CANNOT be spread by casual contact with someone.

The virus is passed by:

- › sharing needles or other equipment used for injecting steroids or other drugs
- › unprotected oral, vaginal or anal sex
- › sharing personal hygiene tools (toothbrushes, razors, nail clippers, etc.)
- › sharing equipment used for tattooing or piercing
- › sharing equipment used for snorting or smoking drugs (pipes, straws, paper money, etc.)
- › a mother to her baby during pregnancy, birth or breastfeeding

Hepatitis C

There is a risk of Hep C from steroid use. Hep C is spread through blood-to-blood contact. Hep C can live for weeks outside of the body so it is important to never share injection equipment. A Hep C infection can happen when blood carrying the virus gets into the bloodstream of another person.

The virus is spread by:

- › sharing needles or other equipment used for injecting steroids or other drugs
- › having unprotected sex where blood could be present (like during rough sex, anal sex or sex when a woman is on her period)
- › sharing personal hygiene tools (toothbrushes, razors, nail clippers, etc.)
- › sharing equipment used for snorting or smoking drugs (pipes, straws, rolled dollar bills, etc.)
- › sharing equipment used for tattooing or piercing

Signs and Symptoms of Hepatitis B & C

Most people don't have any symptoms when they get hepatitis, and there may not be any symptoms for years. By the time signs appear, liver damage could be serious. During this whole time the virus can be passed on to other people. Symptoms could be:

- › tiredness all the time
- › body aches and fever
- › dry, itchy skin
- › abdominal pain, nausea and vomiting
- › jaundice (yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyeballs)

If you think you might be at risk or have any of these symptoms see a healthcare professional for hepatitis testing.

How do I protect myself from hepatitis B and C?

You can get a vaccination (shot) to prevent getting hepatitis A or B, but there is no shot for Hep C. There is also treatment for Hep B and C but first you have to get tested to know if you have the virus.

If you think you are at risk for infection or have been infected, it is important to find out so you can take steps to protect yourself and others.

HIV

HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) is a virus that weakens the immune system, the body's natural defense against sickness and disease. If a person has HIV and doesn't know it, they could develop other illnesses and infections that could have a big impact on their health and pass HIV onto others. If HIV is not treated with anti-HIV drugs, a person can become sick with a life-threatening infection called AIDS.

There is no cure for HIV, but with proper care and treatment, most people with HIV stay healthy for a long time.

How is HIV transmitted?

- HIV is found in blood, semen (including pre-cum), vaginal fluids, rectal fluids and breast milk.
- HIV can be passed when one of these fluids from a person with HIV gets into the bloodstream of another person -- through broken skin, the opening of the penis or mucous membranes (the wet linings of the body) such as the vagina, rectum and foreskin.

The two main ways HIV can be passed are:

- ▶ **sharing needles** or other equipment used for injecting steroids or other drugs
- ▶ **unprotected sex** (vaginal or anal sex without a condom) – oral sex is not as risky, but it's not completely safe

HIV can also be passed by:

- ▶ sharing sex toys
- ▶ sharing piercing and tattoo equipment
- ▶ the mother to a baby during pregnancy, birth or breastfeeding

Signs and Symptoms of HIV

Some people have flu-like symptoms when they first become infected (fever, sore throat or swollen glands). These symptoms usually go away after a few days and a person can have no signs of infection for years.

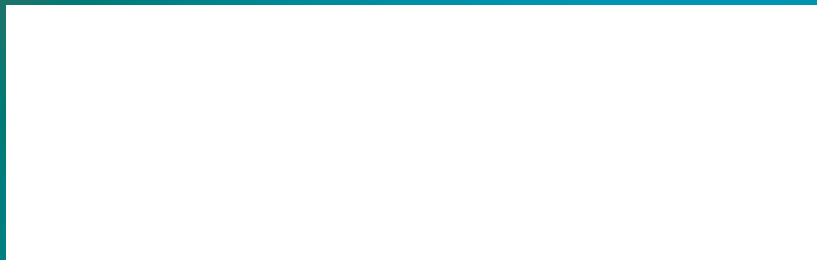
The only way to know if you have HIV is to get tested. It's recommended that anyone who is sexually active and people who are injecting steroids or other drugs get an HIV test at least once a year and after any exposure risk.

How do I protect myself from HIV?

HIV is easily prevented. Using new sterile needles every time you inject and using condoms, lube and/or dental dams when you have sex significantly reduces the risk of getting or passing HIV.

Practicing safer injecting and safer sex are the best ways to protect yourself and others from hepatitis and HIV.





You can reduce your risks by following the safer injection and harm reduction tips given in this booklet. You can pick up needles, safer injecting supplies and more information on safer steroid injection from your local needle and syringe program. Although it might be difficult, we encourage you to talk to your healthcare provider about your steroid use so that you can be as safe as possible.

Need more information and resources on HIV or hepatitis C?

Contact CATIE: 1.800.263.1638 • www.catie.ca • info@catie.ca

CATIE Ordering Centre Catalogue Number: ATI-26426
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Canada's source for
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