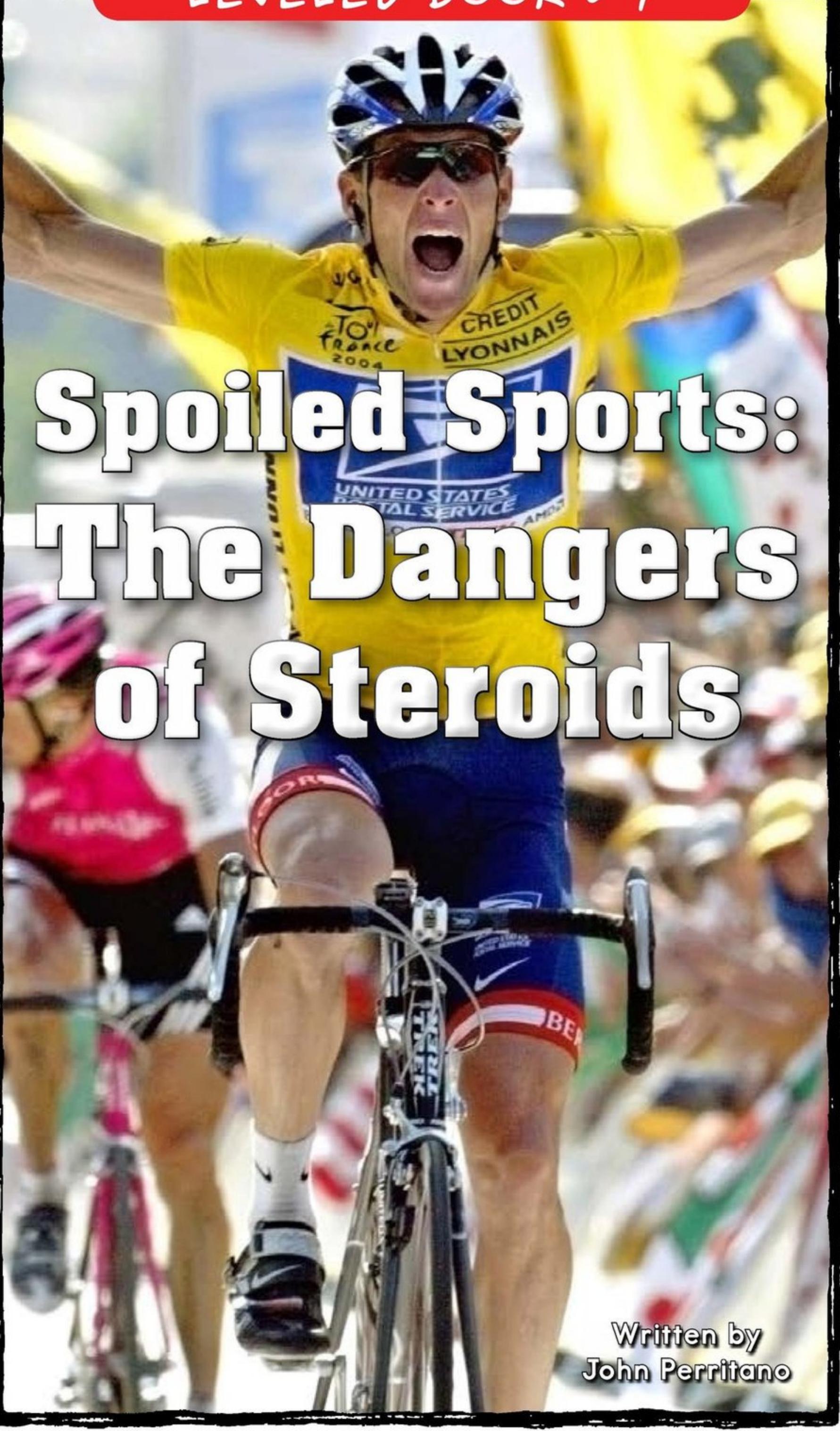


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# Spoiled Sports: The Dangers of Steroids

Written by  
John Perritano

# **Spoiled Sports: The Dangers of Steroids**



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Lance Armstrong riding in the Tour de France

## Introduction

In the world of cycling, no one seemed to fit the bill of a real-life superhero more than Lance Armstrong. He couldn't leap a tall building in a single bound, but he sure could ride a bike.

Armstrong won the world's most grueling cycling race, the Tour de France, seven times between 1999 and 2005. No cyclist had ever done anything so amazing. That's because the Tour de France is one of the most demanding of all sporting events. Cyclists have to be in almost superhuman shape to cover the 2,173-mile (3,497 km) course across the mountainous French countryside. Armstrong's feat was even more remarkable because he had earlier won a life-and-death struggle with cancer.

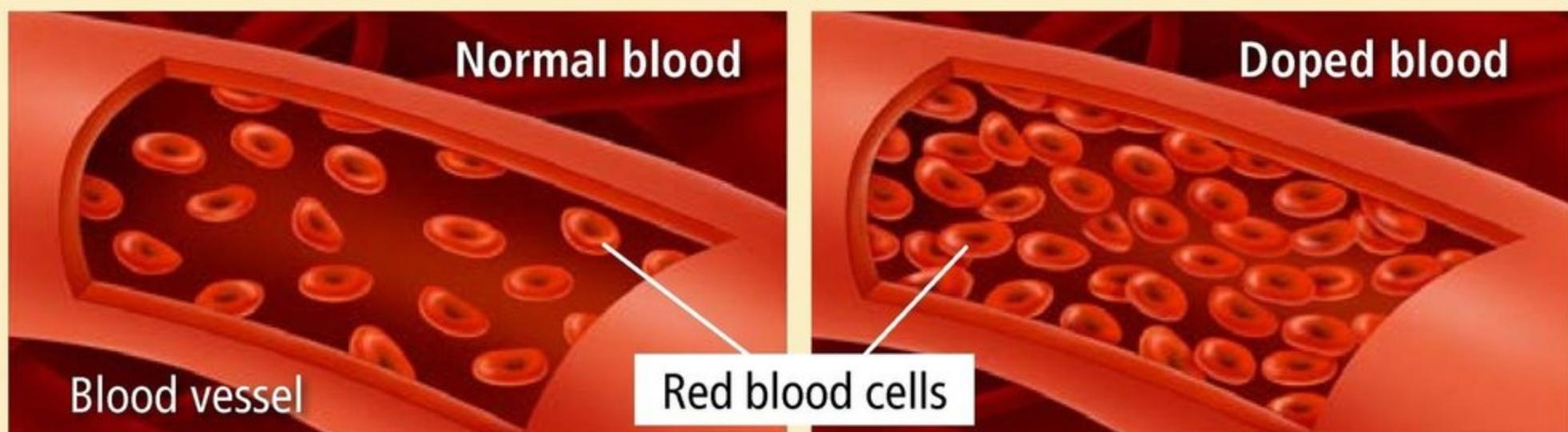
Armstrong was on top of the sports world. He had money and fame, medals and trophies. Then it all collapsed, ruining Armstrong's **reputation**. That's because Lance Armstrong was a **cheater** who **illegally** used **steroids**. They improved his performance and gave him an unfair advantage over cyclists who did not use steroids.

After years of denying that he took steroids, Armstrong admitted in 2013 that his "mythic, perfect story" was "one big lie." Within days, his honors were stripped away, and he became an outcast in the sport he once dominated.

## Blood Doping

Lance Armstrong was also participating in blood doping. Blood doping increases the amount of oxygen carried by the body's red blood cells. The more oxygen a body has, the more efficiently it runs.

One way that athletes can blood dope is to remove and then freeze some of their blood before a competition. By the time the race is on, their bodies will have naturally replaced the missing red blood cells. As the race is set to begin, the athletes will put back the blood they originally took out of their body. As a result, their bodies have extra red blood cells and oxygen to use on game day.





Ben Johnson won the 100-meter sprint at the 1988 Olympic Games. He later tested positive for steroids and had to return his gold medal.

## What Are Steroids?

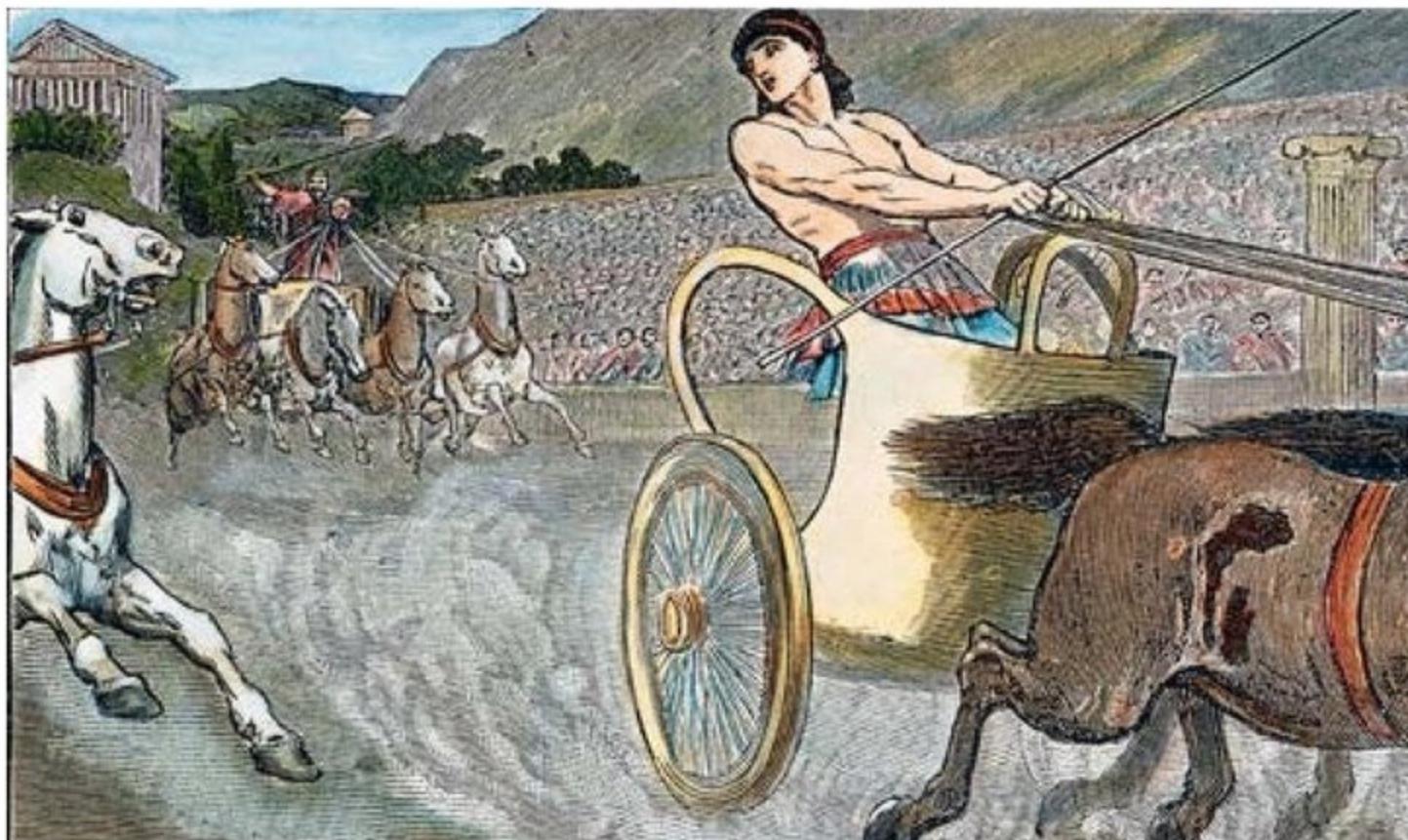
The term *steroids* can refer to different things. The human body naturally produces some steroids as it develops and goes through **puberty**. These natural steroids affect a person's bone and muscle growth and play a role in many other changes. The body keeps these steroids in a delicate balance.

Doctors sometimes prescribe other kinds of steroids to treat health problems such as asthma or skin disorders. These steroids can also be used to help people who have cancer or other serious diseases. However, these steroids should only be used under the careful supervision of a doctor, as they can be very dangerous.

The kinds of steroids that some athletes use are called *anabolic-androgenic steroids* (AAS). *Anabolic* means they affect the way the body builds tissue, such as muscle. *Androgenic* means the development of the body, such as the development of reproductive organs or facial hair. Anabolic-androgenic steroids are often simply referred to as *anabolic steroids*.

Anabolic steroids are similar to the **hormone testosterone**, which the human body produces naturally in small amounts. Artificial steroids, however, change the balance of hormones in the body. While this imbalance allows people to become better athletes in the short term, it can also cause serious health problems.

When people exercise, their muscle fibers develop microscopic rips and tears. When the body naturally repairs these tears, the cells become larger, so muscles grow and become stronger. The more a person exercises, the more the fibers are torn and repaired. Steroids speed up the repair process, and, as a result, steroid users become stronger more quickly than people who don't use those substances.



An engraving  
of the  
Olympic  
Games  
in ancient  
Greece

## History of Steroids

Lance Armstrong is just one in a long line of athletes who have tried to gain an unfair advantage by using special substances. In ancient Greece, the first Olympians drank a special concoction, believing that it made them stronger. Roman chariot racers downed an herbal drink that supposedly increased their **stamina**.

It wasn't until the 1950s that the modern era of performance-enhancing drugs took off. American physician and weight lifter John Ziegler learned that weight lifters from the Soviet Union (now broken up into Russia and other countries) were using artificial steroids to dominate international competitions. Ziegler developed his own **synthetic** steroid and wrote about his discovery in popular bodybuilding magazines. The steroid craze began. Soon, athletes and others began using these substances.

## A Look at Steroid Policies Sport by Sport

	MLB 	NBA 	NFL 
Steroids tests	Yes	Yes	Yes
Penalties for first offense	50-game suspension without pay	5-game suspension	4-game suspension
Penalties for second offense	100-game suspension without pay	10-game suspension	6-game suspension
Penalties for third offense	Lifetime ban	25-game suspension	Minimum 1-year suspension

So many athletes were using steroids that the International Olympic Committee, which organizes the Olympic Games, banned their use in 1975. Today, the use of steroids is banned in every major sport, and the United States has passed laws making the use, possession, or sale of anabolic steroids illegal.

The prospect of going to jail doesn't stop some people, though. They continue to use anabolic steroids in spite of the risks. This has become much easier in recent years with the development of designer steroids. These specially made steroids are designed to be undetectable in drug tests, making it difficult for sports organizations to catch cheaters.

## Bad Medicine

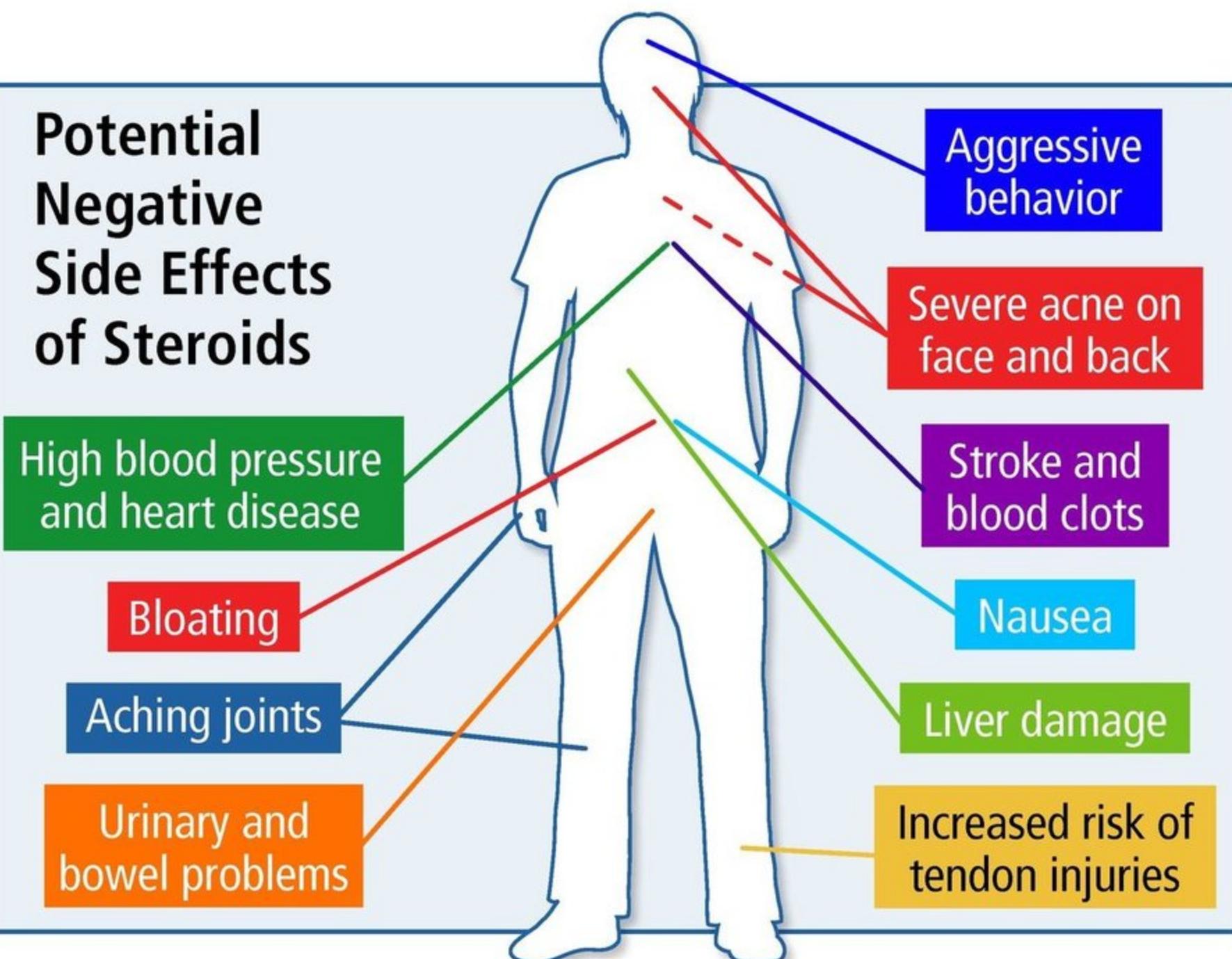
People who take steroids may look more muscular or be able to perform better than before, but these artificial hormones have a big impact on the body and mind. The short-term **side effects** can include persistent bad breath, acne, and swelling of the legs and feet. The long-term use of steroids can ruin or even end a person's life.

Steroids can change the level of blood cholesterol, which is a fatty substance that can build up on the walls of blood vessels. When some of this substance breaks off, it can clog a blood vessel, causing a stroke or heart attack. Since the heart is one big muscle, the use of steroids can cause serious heart problems.

Steroids can also destroy a person's liver, which helps remove waste from the bloodstream. If the liver isn't working properly, the buildup of waste in the blood can cause serious illness.

Steroids can also disrupt the brain's ability to function. They can cause a person to see things that aren't there. They can also cause panic attacks, depression, and an overly aggressive behavior informally called '*'roid rage*'.

## Potential Negative Side Effects of Steroids



Steroids can disrupt a person's natural hormone balance. Women who take steroids may grow facial hair or develop a permanently deeper voice. Men who take steroids can get a condition in which they develop noticeable breast tissue. Adolescents who use steroids can have severe side effects, such as **stunted** growth.

Once a person starts using steroids, stopping can be very dangerous. Because the body's natural balance is completely thrown off, when a steroid user stops taking the drugs, he or she can suffer severe withdrawal symptoms. Depression, muscle aches, nausea, and irritability are only a few of the side effects. Moreover, muscles shrink, and strength diminishes within weeks after stopping.

## Athletes Getting Caught

The year was 1998, and it was one for the record books. Two baseball sluggers, Mark McGwire of the St. Louis Cardinals and Sammy Sosa of the Chicago Cubs, battled one another, hoping to break baseball's single-season home run record. Roger Maris of the New York Yankees had set the record in 1961 with 61 home runs.

McGwire broke Maris's record, slugging 70 home runs. The following season, Barry Bonds of the San Francisco Giants hit 73. It seemed like a spectacular season, but it would soon be tainted.

Sosa, McGwire, Bonds, and other big-name players became mixed up in one of the greatest steroid **scandals** in sports. In the early 2000s, baseball officials revealed that 5 percent of the 1,438 major-league players they tested for drugs took steroids.

Because of their association with steroids, McGwire, Bonds, and other top stars have been refused induction into the Baseball Hall of Fame, the highest honor in the game. They have each been branded a cheater, staining their legacies forever.



Chinese swimmer Wu Yanyan tested positive for anabolic steroids in 1997.

Anabolic steroids can also taint the legacy of Olympic athletes around the world. Chinese swimmer Wu Yanyan set a world record at the Chinese National Games in 1997. A test taken at the Chinese Olympic trials found that Wu Yanyan tested positive for anabolic steroids. As a result, both Yanyan and her coach were fined and dismissed from the Chinese national swim team.

World swimming rules required Yanyan to be suspended from **competitive** swimming for four years. Because of her suspension, Yanyan, one of the top swimmers in the world at the time, was not allowed to compete in the 2000 Olympic Games.

## HGH

Human growth hormone (HGH), as its name suggests, helps the body grow. Some people take daily injections of artificial HGH because their bodies do not produce enough of the hormone to grow properly. Some athletes abuse HGH, believing it increases muscle mass and makes them stronger. However, researchers dismiss these assertions and say that HGH is dangerous when abused.

## Teens on Steroids

Steroid use among teens is a major problem. One study suggests that 6 percent of middle school and high school boys and 5 percent of girls use steroids. The Centers for Disease Control reports that 5.3 percent of high school girls admit to using anabolic steroids.



Community members hold a memorial service for two young athletes who died from steroid use.

When teens are caught using steroids, they are usually no longer allowed to play sports, and they can even be kicked out of school. This one poor choice in middle or high school can cause problems for a person's entire future.

Researchers say teens take steroids because they are influenced by the media's perception of a beautiful body. They also take steroids because of the highly competitive nature of school sports. Many student athletes hope steroids will give them an edge to win. Unfortunately, in an attempt to enhance their physical appearance or abilities, they damage the very thing they are trying to improve—their bodies.



Professional baseball player Mark McGwire being sworn in before testifying about the use of steroids

## Conclusion

Steroids change who you are. In an effort to gain a competitive edge or just larger muscles, the body and mind transform—and this transformation comes at a price.

By using steroids, athletes at all levels run the risk of being labeled cheaters. They tear apart their bodies and minds to earn an artificial victory. In the end, they are left with terrible side effects that may never subside as well as the knowledge that everything they achieved was just “one big lie.”

## Glossary

<b>cheater</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	one who breaks rules for personal gain (p. 5)
<b>competitive</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	of or relating to a rivalry between individuals, teams, or businesses (p. 13)
<b>hormone</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a chemical that changes the way the body grows and develops (p. 7)
<b>illegally</b> ( <i>adv.</i> )	in a way that is against or forbidden by a law or rule (p. 5)
<b>puberty</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	the stage when adolescents become physically mature and capable of reproduction (p. 6)
<b>reputation</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	the general way that a person or thing is thought of by others (p. 5)
<b>scandals</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	behaviors, actions, or events that are seen as shocking or bad and that damage the reputations of those involved (p. 12)
<b>side effects</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	usually harmful effects of drugs or medical treatments that are beyond the desired effect (p. 10)
<b>stamina</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	the strength or energy to do something for a long time (p. 8)
<b>steroids</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a group of drugs that increase tissue growth; sometimes used illegally by athletes to enhance their performance (p. 5)
<b>stunted</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	limited in growth or development (p. 11)
<b>synthetic</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	human-made by combining two or more substances; not occurring in nature (p. 8)

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Page 5: Signe Nordin

Back cover: Olympic gold medalist Marion Jones went to prison in 2008 for lying  
to a federal agent about her steroid use.

Title page: Brazilian women's long jump champion Maurren Higa Maggi tested  
positive for steroids at the Brazilian national championship in 2003.

Table of Contents: Anabolic steroids found by the police in someone's house

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