

Steroids and Other Dangerous Drugs

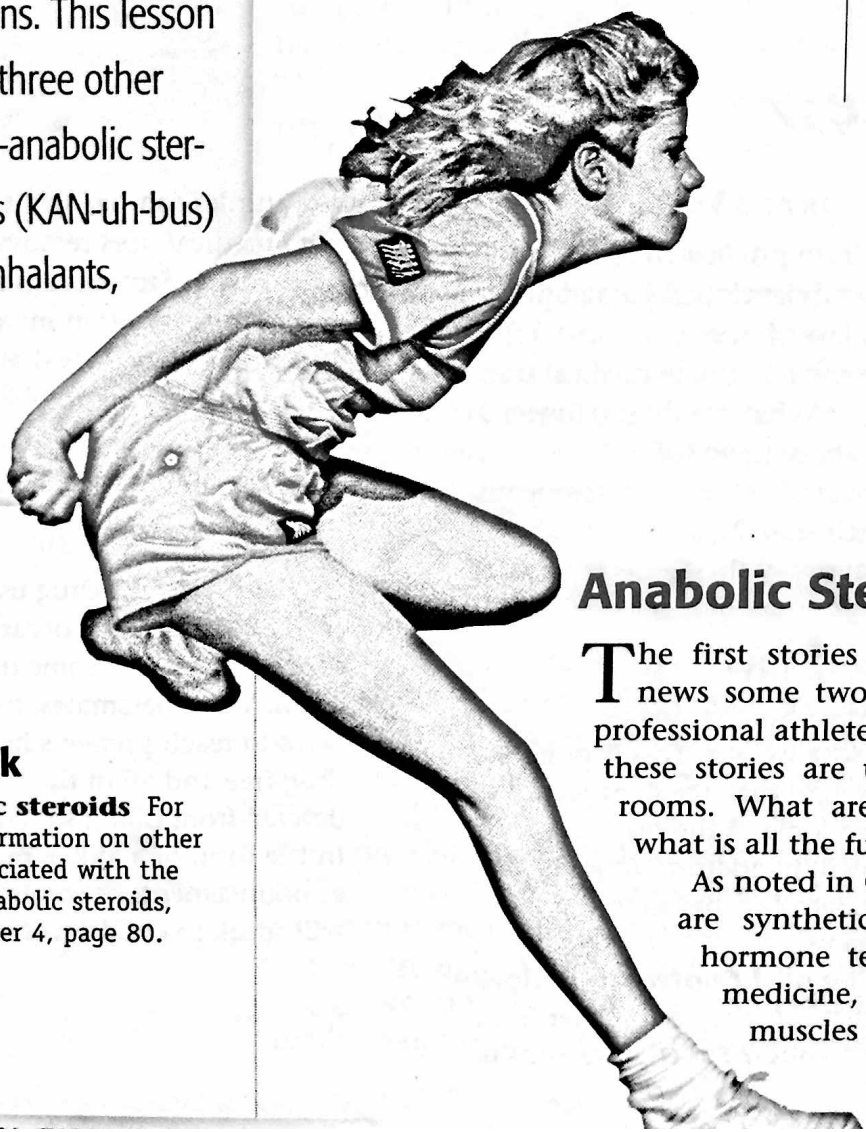
A number of misconceptions surround illegal drugs and their use. Many of these are created by drug pushers whose unsuspecting victims, all too often, are teens. This lesson will examine three other drug groups—**anabolic steroids**, **cannabis** (KAN-uh-bus) derivatives, **inhalants**, and **designer drugs**.

HEALTH TERMS

- marijuana**
- hashish**
- inhalants**
- designer drugs**
- look-alike drugs**

HEALTH CONCEPTS

- The damaging effects of **anabolic steroids** far outweigh their perceived athletic benefits.
- **Marijuana** and other psychoactive drugs have the properties and risks of **hallucinogens**, **stimulants**, and **depressants**.
- **Inhalants** are not meant for human consumption and can be deadly the first time they are abused.



hot link

anabolic steroids For more information on other risks associated with the use of **anabolic steroids**, see Chapter 4, page 80.

Anabolic Steroids

The first stories about steroid abuse made news some two decades ago and involved professional athletes. Nowadays, sadly, some of these stories are unfolding in school locker rooms. What are **anabolic steroids**, and what is all the fuss about?

As noted in Chapter 4, **anabolic steroids** are synthetic derivatives of the male hormone **testosterone**. When used as medicine, these substances help build muscles in patients with chronic

diseases. When used as an illegal drug, as they are by some athletes, anabolic steroids can exact a terrible price on the user in terms of both health and behavior. Steroid use causes mood swings and abnormally violent and aggressive behavior, sometimes referred to as "roid rage." Other serious side effects include **high blood pressure**, acne, baldness, increased risk of liver damage, heart disease, increased growth of body hair and facial hair, and stroke resulting from clogged arteries. In addition, males can experience depression, a decrease in sperm production and testicle size, and an increase in breast size; females can experience breast shrinkage.

One of the most tragic aspects of steroid abuse among teens is that their use is often based on the misguided belief that they make a person stronger. Although these drugs do cause muscles to look bigger, added strength comes only from working the muscles. In the meantime, the risks the drugs pose to life and limb are great.

Cannabis Derivatives

C*annabis* is the scientific name for the hemp plant, which is used as an illegal drug in two forms. **Marijuana**, the more widely used form, is *cannabis that is smoked, eaten, or drunk for intoxicating effects*. **Hashish** (hah-SHEESH), or "hash," is *the dark brown resin collected from the tops of the cannabis plant*. Hashish is usually sold in small brown chunks that are smoked in a pipe. It is sometimes boiled to make hashish oil, which is then combined with tobacco and smoked for even stronger effects.

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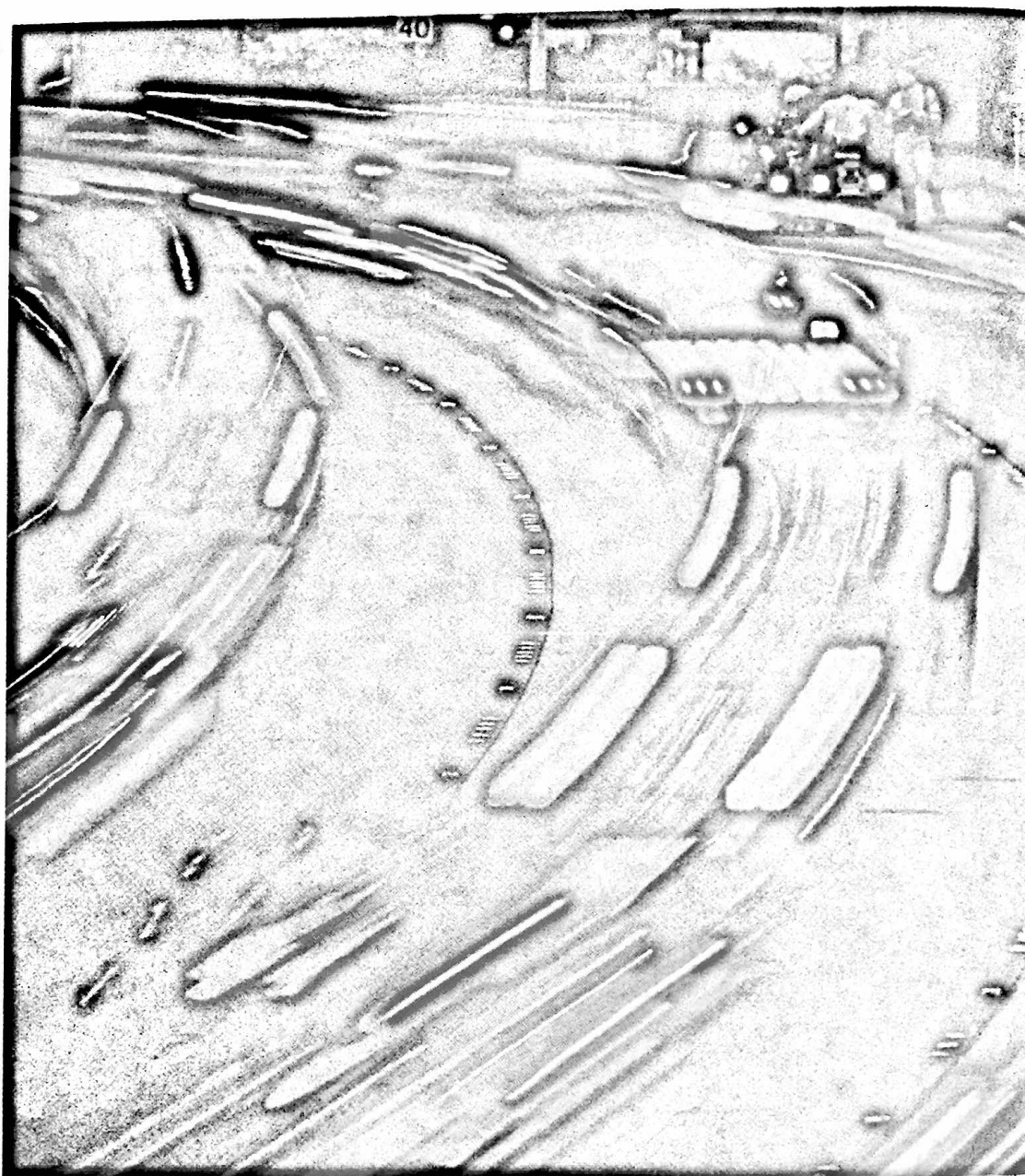
▶ **When you get behind the wheel you take on added responsibility to yourself and others to be safe and alert at all times.**



Driving and Marijuana

Driving under the influence of marijuana can be as dangerous as driving under the influence of alcohol. Marijuana puts added "blindfolds" on a driver by:

- ▶ interfering with the perception of distance,
- ▶ interfering with the perception of depth,
- ▶ impairing thinking and judgment skills,
- ▶ slowing reflexes, thus affecting one's ability to brake and negotiate curves, and
- ▶ impairing the ability to stay in the proper lane.



Physical and Psychological Effects of Cannabis

Cannabis is a hallucinogen that also has the effects of both a depressant and a stimulant. Despite a widespread misconception that people can use marijuana or hashish and still seem and act normal, cannabis used in any form alters your senses, coordination, and reaction time and can interrupt your ability to make rational and healthful decisions. The drug lowers body temperature but increases the heart rate and blood pressure. It stimulates the appetite. Some people may become talkative and giddy, others quiet and withdrawn. The effects vary from person to person and can be influenced by a person's mood and surroundings. Regular marijuana and hashish users tend to have personality problems that include loss of willpower and motivation, lack of energy, and paranoia.

Studies have shown that cannabis affects memory, making it more difficult to recall things and to pay attention. Drivers under the influence of marijuana or hashish react slower and make more accident-causing mistakes than drivers who are not under the influence.

Cannabis smoke contains more cancer-causing chemicals than cigarette smoke. Because marijuana users often inhale unfiltered smoke deeply and hold it in the lungs, it is damaging to the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. Smoking cannabis also interferes with the immune system and may cause permanent damage, making the user more highly susceptible than normal to infections from bacteria.

Regular use of marijuana or hashish lowers levels in the blood of the male hormone testosterone and decreases sperm production. Females of childbearing age should avoid cannabis use, since the drug can result in stillbirths, decreased birth weight, and a condition in the infant similar to fetal alcohol syndrome.

Inhalants

Inhalants are *substances with breathable fumes that are sniffed and inhaled to give a hallucinogenic or mind-altering high*. Included among the inhalants are glue, spray paints, aerosols, lighter fluid, and gasoline. Most inhalants depress the central nervous system and produce effects similar to those of alcohol. Immediate effects of inhalants include nausea, sneezing, coughing, nosebleeds, fatigue, lack of coordination, and loss of appetite. Heavy use of inhalants can result in liver and kidney damage, changes in bone marrow, and permanent brain damage. Inhalant use can also lead to hearing loss, limb spasms, and blood oxygen depletion. A person can go into a coma from a single use and be in a vegetative state, on a respirator, the rest of his or her life. High concentrations of inhalants can cause suffocation.

Did You Know?

- Every year in this country, an estimated 1,000 teens die from breathing fumes from such products as glues, gases, and household sprays.
- According to the Monitoring the Future Survey, in 1998, 11.1 percent of eighth graders and 8 percent of tenth graders had used inhalants at least one time in the previous year.

HEALTH
Online



Link to the National Inhalant Prevention Coalition at health.glencoe.com to learn about the damaging effects of inhaling common substances.

Building Health Skills

Refusal Skills: Saying No to Drugs

LEARNING TO SAY NO effectively to drugs can be an important component in maintaining a drug-free life. Here are some effective ways to help you in your efforts to refuse drugs.



1. **Make a firm commitment to stay drug-free.** You may even want to write it down in contract or pledge form or make a drug-free pact with a close friend.
2. **Learn and practice effective lines to use in refusing drugs.** Possibilities include: "No thanks, I don't do drugs"; "That stuff makes me sick"; or "I'm on medication." Once you have said no, stick to your guns.
3. **Avoid being around drugs and people who use them.** If you are at a party or other gathering where drugs are being used, leave. Stick with friends who support your drug-free commitment. Create a life that is active, full, and contrary to a life of drug use.

Behavior while under the influence of an inhalant has been the cause of many accidental deaths. Inhalants have also been shown to be gateway drugs, and teens often used them first before moving on to "hard" drugs such as heroin. The peak age for inhalant use is about 14.

Designer and Look-Alike Drugs

To avoid using illegal substances, underground or street chemists make **designer drugs**, *synthetic substances meant to imitate the effects of narcotics and hallucinogens*. One of the most well-known designer drugs is called *ecstasy*, or *MDMA*, which has a chemical composition similar to that of methamphetamine and mescaline. A combination stimulant and hallucinogen, ecstasy may give a short-term feeling of euphoria but can result in confusion, depression, paranoia, psychosis, increases in heart rate and blood pressure, and even long-term damage to brain cells.

These drugs can be several hundred times stronger than the drugs they are meant to imitate. Symptoms of designer drug use include uncontrollable tremors, drooling, impaired speech, paralysis, and irreversible brain damage.

An equally dangerous group of street drugs is **look-alike drugs**, *drugs made so as to physically resemble specific illegal drugs*. With these drugs, the user never knows exactly what he or she is getting. Look-alike "speed," for example, might contain high doses of caffeine plus cold medicines. Such mixtures can cause dangerously fast heart rates, changes in blood pressure, strange behavior, nervousness, and breathing problems. Using these kinds of drugs or mixing them with other drugs is very dangerous. Sometimes a sugar substitute is put in a capsule and sold as an illegal drug—at a huge profit.

The use of look-alikes is hard to diagnose. This makes treatment very difficult. If look-alikes are taken with other drugs, such as alcohol, serious reactions can occur. If a user is admitted to an emergency room, the medical staff may not be able to treat the patient successfully because no one can know for sure what drugs the user took.