In the last UK Beef, I discussed a little about image and performance enhancing drugs (IPEDs).

There are a number of misconceptions within the general public regarding steroids. They do not shrink the penis. Sadly, nor will they make it grow. When taken by a female, steroids can cause clitoral enlargement. Try and figure that one out! They will, however shrink men’s balls. Testicular atrophy is the term which describes this reduction in mass. It can be pronounced. “The size of raisins” and “balls like peanuts” are both examples of descriptions heavy long term anabolic steroid users have described to me. My favourite was “like a pair of skittles”. No man *under exaggerates* the size of his genitals. Ever.

In terms of general harm, steroids (if used sensibly and with legitimate pharmaceutical products) are generally considered to be relatively safe as a class of drug. Relative when compared to other drugs and lifestyle choices. A bottle of vodka a day with 40 Benson and Hedges will very probably fuck you over more than injecting 2ml of Sustanon a week for 12 weeks ever will.

While steroids make up the bulk of IPEDs that are used, they’re also just the tip of the iceberg. It’s what lurks below the surface of the IPED world that is more worrying.

Steroid use causes side effects. Fact.

Admittedly this is largely dose dependant. The more steroids that are used, the greater the incidence of unwanted side effects. It really is that obvious. Many steroid users take a poly pharmacy of different drugs to counteract the side effects. Ironically (and predictably) these additional drugs have a side effect profile of their own. So different classes of drugs are then added to the mix. It can become quite ludicrous. A lot of it is ‘Bro-science’ gone mad.

Examples of types of medication that are frequently used as IPEDs include those prescribed for breast cancer, female infertility, Parkinson’s disease, diabetes, prostate disease, thyroid disorders, acne and dwarfism in children.

The trouble is the supply of these drugs. They don’t simply all fall off the back of a lorry. Most of the pharmaceutical industry is tightly controlled and rigorously regulated. Some items are diverted onto the black market, but nowhere near as much as demand dictates. One third of anabolic steroids available in the UK are either fake or contain no active ingredient. Up to 80% of drugs bought on the internet are counterfeit or fake. Buyers beware, indeed. Far safer to ask around and develop a good rapport with someone who will sort you with quality stuff and provide safe, sensible advice.

The majority of IPEDs used in the UK are made in Underground Labs. Bulk raw ingredients are shipped into the country. Then these are basically cooked up and processed around the country. Some products and set ups are rather sophisticated. I’ve seen them. Others products appear more of a ‘care in the community’ type of affair. It’s scary. And these drugs are being injected into people.

A lot of people. Statistics are patchy at best, but the 2012 British Crime Survey suggests that 70,000 people used steroids in 2011. Anabolic steroid use has risen dramatically since then. And this was a wildly conservative estimate. More realistic figures being ten times that. When those in the know are asked how many people use IPEDs, we offer a collective shrug and reply unanimously; “a shitload” (paraphrasing by author).

But at least anabolic steroids (and other IPEDs) are medications. This means that they have been thoroughly researched, trialled, tested on animals then human studies performed. All these hoops have to be jumped through before the drug being licenced for prescribing. It takes a long time and a lot of money to develop medicines. Designer steroids, peptides and pro-hormones do not.

They. Are. Horrible. They are the gym scene equivalent of ‘legal highs’ that are causing a nuisance (and deaths) on the drug scene. For example, cannabis is illegal, but those who smoke it know what to expect from it, if they choose to do so. Generally, it’s quite safe and causes little problem to either the individual or society. Synthetic cannabis is not illegal and can be bought online or in ‘headshops’. However, the effects are unpredictable and are directly attributable to numerous deaths. At least you know where you are with a joint of weed than some synthetic ‘legal high’. The similarity between anabolic steroids and pro-hormones is the same.

These ‘pro-hormones’ are constantly evolving substances that evade an illegal status by having a molecular tweaking. They are not a recognised legitimate steroid or medication, so not technically a drug. They are available online and even advertised as an anabolic steroid alternative. So, because they’re not a scheduled drug they’re ok? No. They’re not. End of story.

This nasty shit is neither trialled nor tested. There are no rigorous safeguards. They are just made and flogged under the guise of a legal steroid substitute. A lot of them even have anabolic steroid sounding names. Some are sold as “research chemicals, not for human consumption”. Slippery bastards.

Avoid any supplement that claims to alter hormone levels. Most contain these toxic substances. Some explicitly state they contain them; it’s not (yet) illegal after all. The most deranged blood results I see are from the use of these ‘legal steroid alternatives’. It’s usually the liver, but they don’t do your bollocks any favours either.

What is the point of a lean muscular body and having a cock that’s stuck in power save mode?

Keep yourself safe. Keep any IPED use to a minimum and don’t be a lab rat for ‘the next best thing’.

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