

## **Performance and Image Enhancing Drugs**

The only drugs with ulterior motives

When I hear the words “Performance enhancing drugs” or “Image enhancing drugs” I cringe. Yes, they do have their so-called “benefits” such as body fat reduction or muscle mass increases. But, unfortunately enough, all too many people tend to ignore the risks either out of ignorance or lack of education.

A truism once said by Donald Lyn Frost, which could not be more true: “Drugs take you to hell, disguised as heaven”. While you may reap some benefits, you will always have to battle with the risks in the background, which is the true hell.

As an athlete myself in the form of cycling, I understand the reason behind some people taking them. However, I do not understand the reason why they would gamble with the risks. I am sure the other athletes currently reading this article know that the use of Performance and Image Enhancing Drugs (PEIDs), more commonly known in sports as doping, is a big misdemeanour. One which has ended the careers of many famous athletes. Does Lance Armstrong come to the mind of anybody? Yes, point made.

There has been a large study taken out by well-respected Australian colleges; Griffith University and University of Canberra, which has pointed out that 4% of 900 junior athletes have taken performance or image-enhancing drugs.

### **What are the risks of taking Performance and Image-Enhancing Drugs?**

A drug, as defined by Oxford Dictionaries, is a medicine or other substance which has a physiological effect when ingested or otherwise introduced to the body. Many drugs have been essential for the treatment of many medical conditions. However, PEIDs are not drugs to be praised.

The risks of the consumption of these drugs have not been given more awareness in the past, resulting in an ever-increasing use of these drugs with the risks being ignored as soon as the drugs are used.

Let me put this into a context that many people will be able to understand. Have you ever gotten used to using something so much, for example sugar in tea, that you cannot imagine living without it now? If you answered yes, you can now empathise what it is like to be ever involved with these drugs. PEIDs, particularly steroids, are anabolic substances. In layman terms, this means that they make something small bigger i.e. Muscle Mass. Unfortunately, in the process, these drugs have now interfered with natural muscle building processes, creating an over-reliance or dependence, which is very hard to come back from. So, my point is that it is much easier to avoid them in the first place than having to deal with these consequences.

Let's get back to the reason these drugs are used in the first place. In sports, they are often used to improve performance with the most likely aim of winning the sport. But, there is often ignorance to the fact that these drugs could make their chances of winning even lower. If a dependence for PEIDs, withdrawal also occurs. Withdrawal inevitably results in fatigue, weakness and weight loss among many other harmful effects. This, in turn, reverses all the desired performance increases and makes the whole experience a dangerous waste of time.

Now, I feel that I must give my personal side of story to this article. As a cyclist myself, I am constantly infuriated by "doping" which my sport has been given a very poor name because of it. I feel that it is a disgrace which should be addressed much more often. Only 2 years ago, the Irish cycling world was shocked by the 4 years ban of Ciarán Kelly for having Clebuterol in his system. Before this, I was so sure nothing like this would ever happen on our small island. I am sure that you can imagine my disappointment when I found out that this was true. Furthermore, because of doping I have lost a cycling idol which I have admired for years before. Lance Armstrong, of course, is the cyclist I am referring to. So, although not knowing anybody personally who has been affected by Performance and Image-enhancing drugs, I certainly have been affected by them remotely. I may not have used them myself, but that does not mean that they can't anger or affect me.

What also angers me is when I see people searching for steroids which has the least risks involved. In my opinion, a steroid is a steroid as a drug is a drug. PEIDs can bring many small effects such as acne, bloating and hair loss. But, like any drug, they also carry large risks with them like: heart problems, heart attacks, jaundice, prostate problems and liver and kidney problems. Of course, the safest option is not taking drugs at all, which is much better than looking for safer alternatives with the least risks involved.

Before you go, let me remind you that drugs may not only affect you. They can also affect many people around you and also can affect your work, study and financial situation. And if you are an athlete reading this, do not disgrace your sport just for the sake of winning. Please do not kill the spirit of sport. Sport should be something to win without having to cheat, it should be something to show yourself and your achievements for who you really are. Let yourself win the race or match, not some silly drug to win it for you. If you find yourself at the end of this article still wanting more muscles or want more speed, don't go down to drugs. Use dedication and commitment to get what you desire. Hop on your bike and work on your speed or head down to the gym. You would feel more satisfied with yourself and you can get everything a drug would have given you without the risks attached with it.

To summarise, don't take drugs, don't drink alcohol, go to bed early, train hard and be dedicated to being a good example and you will thank yourself for it in the end!

**References:**

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