

# Healthy Alternatives to Steroids Do Exist

by Mike Sullivan MS, ATC

Recently the news has reported concerns extending to the national level regarding the use and abuse of anabolic-androgenic steroids. Even locally, here in Illinois, the General Assembly passed a law mandating steroid abuse education beginning in 2006 in all schools offering interscholastic sports competition.

“Steroids” is the familiar name used to refer to synthetic substances related to the male sex hormones (androgens). They promote the growth of skeletal muscle (anabolic effects) and the development of male sexual characteristics (androgenic effects). When prescribed and supervised by a physician for a medically indicated condition, these substances are extremely beneficial. However, as with most drugs, obtained and taken illegally without medical supervision, these substances become extremely dangerous.

Athletes need to realize that proper nutrition, weight and aerobic training as well as sports injury care are the keys to safe enhanced sports participation. As evidenced

by the national concern with chronic obesity which is occurring at younger ages, over or under eating is not the problem; proper nutrition and exercise are the central components to healthy lives.

It is important to realize that children are not “mini adults”. They have special nutritional needs. Many athletes have either not hit puberty or are beginning the process as they enter the competitive sports realms. Use of steroids can actually prematurely stop this process resulting in stunted growth and increased injury rates.

The most appropriate diet for young athletes includes a diet that is high in nutrient-dense complex carbohydrates; contains moderate amounts of protein, salt, sugars, and sodium; is low in fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol; and provides sufficient calories. Additionally, diet needs to contain variety, moderation and balance. No one food or food group, nor does any one supplement provides all the needs of the growing athlete.



Furthermore, with or without steroids, physical activity is necessary for the muscular development and skills enhancement that result in superior sports performance. A structured and balanced physical conditioning regimen including strength training, cardiovascular conditioning, and sport specific skills instruction are the key components to safe athletic participation.

For more information about steroids and detecting use, you may go to the National Institute on Drug Abuse website at [www.nida.nih.gov](http://www.nida.nih.gov). For additional sports specific information regarding youth sports nutrition, check out MomsTeam at [www.momsteam.com](http://www.momsteam.com) which was linked in articles at the NIDA website. Of course, contacting your local athletic trainer, team physician, or our staff here at Hinsdale Orthopaedics is another local option for additional resources to healthy and safe alternatives to steroid use.



## THE SPORTS MEDICINE INJURY CLINIC

We have created the injury clinic on Monday evenings to specifically address the needs of athletes who are injured over the weekend. The clinic offers prompt diagnosis and treatment by a physician specializing in sports medicine so the athlete can return to his or her sport as soon as possible.

**Call our 24 hour hotline 630-455-7122**  
Monday evening appointments starting at 5:00 p.m.