

Study finds potentially treatable factors to improve symptoms in men stopping illicit steroids

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Men who illicitly used steroids to boost muscle size and physical performance and have stopped in the past year have impaired sexual function compared with men currently using steroids, according to a study being presented Sunday at [ENDO 2024](#), the Endocrine Society's annual meeting in Boston, Mass.

Having a psychiatric diagnosis and stopping steroids was associated with greater impairment in [sexual function](#), the researchers found.

"It is important to recognize the symptoms that men experience within the first year of stopping steroids," said lead researcher Bonnie Grant, M.B.B.S., of Imperial College London in London, U.K. "We observed that some factors such as psychiatric diagnosis and lower testosterone levels may contribute to worse symptoms of depression and sexual dysfunction."

Millions of men worldwide illicitly use anabolic-androgenic steroids. These substances act like the male hormone testosterone to increase muscle growth, enhance body physique, and improve athletic performance. Using steroids is dangerous as they can lead to heart attacks, strokes, [high blood pressure](#), [mental health problems](#) and even death, Grant said.

Steroids stop the body from producing natural testosterone in men. When steroids are stopped, there is often a delay in the body making natural testosterone. During this time, men report feeling a low sex drive, low mood, anxiety, [suicidal thoughts](#), with an overall decline in well-being.

"There are currently no treatments which doctors can give these men to reduce these symptoms, and often men restart using steroids," said

Channa Jayasena M.D., Ph.D., the senior study author. He noted that no previous studies have focused on measuring symptoms within the first year of stopping steroids or investigated independently associated factors for these symptoms.

Grant and colleagues collected data from 165 men across England. Of these, 43 men had never used steroids, 76 were currently using steroids and 46 had stopped using steroids within the last 12 months. The men were asked about symptoms of sexual function, depression, anxiety, and quality of life. They also had a [blood test](#) done for testosterone and other reproductive hormone levels.

The study found that men stopping steroids less than one year ago had a 12% lower sexual function score compared with men currently using steroids. Erectile function, [sexual desire](#) and overall satisfaction scores were lower in men stopping steroids compared to men currently using steroids. Having a psychiatric diagnosis and stopping steroids was associated with greater impairment in sexual function.

Depression scores were 75% higher in men who stopped using steroids within the last year compared with men who had never used steroids. Having a psychiatric diagnosis and lower testosterone levels was associated with higher depression scores. Men who had stopped using steroids also were less energetic and more fatigued compared with men who had never used steroids.

"These data reveal potentially treatable factors to improve symptoms men experience when they stop using [steroids](#)," Grant said.

Provided by The Endocrine Society

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