

'Performance enhancing' drugs decrease performance

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Credit: Peter Griffin/Public Domain

Doping is damaging the image of sport without benefitting athletes' results, according to University of Adelaide research.

Researchers from the University's School of Medical Sciences collated sporting records (including Olympic and [world records](#)) of male and [female athletes](#) across 26 [sports](#), between 1886 and 2012. Comparisons

were made between pre-1932 records (when steroids became available) and post, and it was found that the times, distances and other results did not improve as expected in the [doping](#) era.

The findings were published in the *Journal of Human Sport and Exercise*.

"The effects of doping in modern sports are far and widespread, encompassing not only the athletes and sporting teams involved, but also sponsors and fans," says Dr Aaron Hermann, lead author on the paper.

"This research looked at 26 of the most controlled and some of the most popular sports, including various track and field events like 100m sprints, hurdles, high jump, long jump and shot-put, as well as some winter sports like speed skating and ski jumping.

"The average best life records for 'doped' top athletes did not differ significantly from those considered not to have doped. Even assuming that not all cases of doping were discovered during this time, the practice of doping did not improve sporting results as commonly believed," he says.

Dr Hermann says these results not only demonstrate the negative impact of doping on sports results but may also show that doping is more widespread than initially thought.

"The 2000 Olympics gold medal result for the women's 100m sprint was even poorer than the gold medal obtained in the 1968 Olympics, the first year of doping testing in the Olympics," Dr Hermann says.

"This research demonstrates that doping practices are not improving results and in fact, may be harming them – seemingly indicating that 'natural' human abilities would outperform the potentially doping 'enhanced' athletes – and that in some sports, doping may be highly

prevalent," he says.

Dr Hermann hopes these findings will change elite [athletes](#)' and junior sports participants' perceptions on doping.

"The success rate of doping tests may be as little as 4% and some anti-doping initiatives to date have been very ineffective," says Dr Hermann.

"Doping may produce a minor improvement in one aspect of performance but in other areas, it may have a detrimental effect, which outweighs the positive.

"In many sports, there are perceptions that an athlete needs to dope in order to remain competitive and I hope these findings will confront those ill-informed views, and help stamp out doping in sport," he says.

More information: "Long term effects of doping in sporting records: 1886-2012." [DOI: 10.14198/jhse.2014.93.05](https://doi.org/10.14198/jhse.2014.93.05)

Provided by University of Adelaide

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