

Tara Nott

**ON TAKING PERFORMANCE
DRUGS**



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WEIGHTLIFTING, OLYMPIC GOLD MEDALIST

I was a gymnast for 10 years. I was strong and powerful—but I found gymnastics too intense for me. When I quit—I missed the athletic competition. Then, five years ago, I started training for another sport—weightlifting. Right away, I was pretty good at it. I competed in the lightest weight class—the 50-kilo. Eight months after starting lifting, I won the national championships.

And then the rumors started to fly about me. “She’s got to be taking drugs”. “No one could be that good so fast!” You see—taking performance drugs is very common in my sport. But I would never do that. It’s against the rules, it’s not fair and it’s very dangerous.

I got so angry about the rumors. I was so insulted. I hated cheating. My coach said, “Tara, take it as a compliment. You are just so good. You know that you wouldn’t do it. You know who you are.”

A lot of people take artificial drugs in my sport because it is an easier, quicker way to improve their strength. Let’s face it—training for weightlifting competition is very, very hard. It means hours and hours in the gym every day. I love it, but some people don’t want to work hard and they don’t care about cheating.

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When I go to international events, it is easy to spot the girls who are taking performance-enhancing drugs. They have deep voices. They have lots of acne. Their bodies look like men’s. They are even growing beards. They are so wrapped up in taking the drugs and not getting caught that they don’t realize what they are doing to themselves until it is too late.

At the 2000 Olympic Games I had a direct experience with the effects of drug use. I had won the silver medal, and boy, was I thrilled! Then three days later, the girl from Bulgaria who had won the gold tested positive for illegal performance drug use. They gave the gold to me. I really felt her shame. She not only lost her gold medal, but she lost the respect of her country and the whole world.

Winning gets way too important for some people. I see high school kids taking drugs to unnaturally bulk up. Some of these substances even come from the “health food” store. But Andro and Creatine are dangerous, too. It makes me so sad to see these girls destroying themselves.

Sport is a wonderful journey. You get to prove something to yourself every day. And winning can be fun. But it is sure not worth risking your health, risking your ability to have a baby one day, or risking your life.

PERFORMANCE DRUGS

If you or your teammates are thinking about experimenting with performance drugs, extra facial hair, stinky breath and acne will be the least of your worries! Substances used to artificially jack you up or make you perform better have side effects that are not only disgusting, but really dangerous as well.

Aside from being nasty and harmful, performance drugs are a form of cheating, illegal and just plain wrong! If you take steroids and win a race, it's really not a win at all. You don't cross the finish line first because you trained harder or have the best form, you cross the finish line first because you had an unfair advantage. You cheated everyone—including yourself.

Real athletes don't need to load their bodies up with drugs to be the best. They train hard and put in the extra 110 percent to reach their sports goals. They honor their bodies like shrines and keep them in tiptop shape with healthy eating and sleeping habits. When real athletes win, it's not because they cheated, it's because their minds had the determination and their bodies were prepared with months of sweat and soreness. Forget performance drugs. Choose to take care of your body. Choose to win like a real athlete.

Red Flags

ARE YOU ...

- Feeling moody (nervous, angry, cranky)

DO YOU HAVE ...

- Sleeping problems
- Muscle cramps and spasms

YOU'RE HEADED FOR ...

- Stunted growth
- Body morphing (deeper voice, facial hair, smaller boobs, enlarged clitoris)
- Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea
- Dehydration and exhaustion
- Addiction
- Seizures
- Stroke
- Heart problems/disease

Not sure exactly what performance drugs are? Here's the quick and dirty on this dangerous stuff:

STEROIDS ('ROIDS, JUICE, ROCKET FUEL)—Swallowed as a pill or shot into your body with a needle, these powerful drugs act like testosterone. Steroids are used by athletes in any sport to build muscle fast.

HGH/HUMAN GROWTH HORMONES—Taken as pills or injections, these can cause liver damage, cancer and early death.

STORE-BOUGHT SUPPLEMENTS (CREATINE, ANDROSTENEDIONE AND EPHEDRA)—Trendy and easy to find, these pills are supposed to increase stamina and strength.

STIMULANTS (AMPHETAMINES, EPHEDRINE, COCAINE, NICOTINE AND EVEN CAFFEINE)—These drugs make you less tired and more alert. Athletes sometimes take stimulants to make them concentrate better or to keep their energy level revved up.

DIURETICS—These drugs are used to make you lose weight fast by chasing important fluids out of your body. Diuretics are most often used by athletes who compete in specific weight classes—like wrestlers.

Deal With it

- Train hard. Train safely—without cheating.
- Eat healthy.
- Get lots of sleep.
- Set realistic athletic goals.
- Honor your body—make it naturally the best.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CALL OR SURF:

- A Steroids hotline 1-800-STEROIDS
- A National Clearinghouse for Drug Information
1-800-487-4889
- www.aap.org/family/steroids.htm
Health information for kids
- www.consumersunion.org
Information on consumer issues

Additional resources are listed in the Resources section of this Guide.