Juiced

How to protect your teen from the temptations of muscle-building drugs

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Mary J. Blige and Wyclef Jean are among the handful of black celebrities who have been linked to—though not charged in—a recent New York steroid sting. As the use of muscle-enhancing drugs extends beyond the sports realm, many black teenagers—particularly boys—may feel extra pressure to take short cuts to bulk up.

But they expose themselves to a number of health risks, namely abnormal hormone levels, aggressiveness, liver cancer, testicular cancer and heart disease, according to William F. King, MD, a pediatrician and adjunct professor at Temple University, in Philadelphia. Dr. King says that a handful of his patients have admitted taking steroids. But, he adds, the patients stop when he tells them that steroids shut down the body's natural production of testosterone, which may temporarily decrease sperm count and shrink the testicles.

"That's the first thing I tell kids right off," King says. "If you're trying to be big and bad and look good, just make sure you don't take your drawers off."

Instead of doping, or taking legal over-the-counter supplements such as creatine powders—which can strain organs like the kidneys—people can heed King's alternative recommendations: multivitamins and high-protein foods such as egg whites, chicken breast or even a milk shake for that extra boost.

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