

life



An upper body progress picture from after his first steroid cycle

A young gym user tells Shaun Gray... How MUSCLE dysmorphia has **TAKEN OVER** his entire life

In a world where anorexia is looked upon as a serious mental health condition, the 21st century has brought to light reverse anorexia, an anxiety disorder commonly known as "bigorexia".

Rob Wilson, the chair of the Body Dysmorphic Disorder Foundation, says one in 10 men who attend the gym is affected by bigorexia at present.

Muscle dysmorphia or bigorexia is where someone sees themselves as being small despite being big and muscular, it is a growing problem amongst men across the world.

Rishabh Hegde, a doctor from Bombay Mumbai in India spoke of treatments available for the condition: "Most of the treatment revolves around psychiatric treatment and counselling.

"You counsel and treat the patient and make him understand. The biggest problem currently is that the men who face such a condition including athletes do not feel that they have any problem.

"That denial in itself is very problematic for a person who is trying to treat the patient."

This results in the condition being severely underreported and therefore people going without treatment.

A source who preferred to keep his anonymity spoke of his journey with muscle dysmorphia and how it has implicated other areas of his life.

The first time he stepped foot in a gym was at 15 years old, he swapped the classroom for the weights room and he has never looked back.

He said: "I worked out primarily to increase my performance in football (American football), it was more for just enjoyment at the time.

"I was pretty fat but I was strong. At this point, I didn't care about my looks."

With four years of on-and-off training under his belt, he conscientiously decided it was time for a change. He wanted to strip the fat and he wanted

to reveal the muscle he had put on.

Credited as the turning point that resulted in his obsession with body image, he started to think certain physiques in the media were not attainable naturally.

"I felt like I could never achieve that standard so I started to research as much as I could, I became fascinated with how they worked but was always scared because of the legal issues.

"I looked for a supplement that could give the steroid like results, legally and ended up wasting a ton of money on worthless products."

Hope was not lost however, he came across Selective Androgen Receptor Modulators or SARMs for short. Although not entirely legal themselves, SARMs target specific areas of muscle tissue growth with allegedly no side effects like anabolic steroids have.

Steroids work in a similar way, injectable testosterone for example bind with androgen receptors and increase uptake of transcription which means that genes used for muscle repair following muscle damage caused by weight training are heightened in their efficiency beyond natural levels.

"Without hesitation I bought LGD, S4 and Otstrane, like an idiot I just started taking them all at once. I gained about 20 pounds of pure muscle in a matter of a few months using them.

"The way the gains and strength came was addictive. It was like being on a winning streak at the roulette table."

Bizarrely, although marketed with limited side-effects, his high dosage of different variations of SARMs resulted in partial blindness.

"I just dealt with it. It was more of a trouble of adjusting to light changes, I expected the loss of vision for a moment when going from a dark room to a bright room. Driving at night was the main difficulty."

Despite his loss of sight, he continued his use of the SARMs until he ran out – he found that when he discontinued use completely, the muscle gains he had made from using them had diminished.

He believes that they were a waste of money in spite of their initial effectiveness, ultimately he felt the next step to satisfy his obsessive craving for muscle was anabolic steroids.

The very first he used steroids was in early 2016. He ran a 'cycle', these are used to minimise permanent damage to the Hypothalamic-Pituitary-Testicular Axis (responsible for testosterone and sperm production) and Endocrine System (group of glands that produce hormones in the blood), problems occur as the human body was not intended to have extra testosterone coming in from synthetic hormone steroids so it consequently shuts down natural testosterone production.

As a result, a post cycle therapy is required in-between cycles. The idea is to use testosterone

boosting compounds to prevent extensive hormonal damage and muscle loss. With a lack of testosterone being produced by the body, symptoms can occur such as depression, lack of libido and reduced immune function.

"I started with Sustanon 250 (testosterone blend for increased muscle growth), then added clenbuterol combined with t3 hormone (cytomel) to become leaner. It started with a 5 week experiment but turned into 15 weeks and I added in dianabol (fast acting muscle growth) for the last 5 weeks. I gained 45lbs."

Although the 45lbs gain well surpassed his expectations, the side-effects he suffered were to be expected. At 21 years old, his hairline has started to recede, he has become short-tempered in his everyday life and he suspects that he may have sustained damage to his liver from oral steroid use.

"I think steroids are the reason I have muscle dysmorphia. When I started taking gear, I felt

like the limit was gone and nothing could stop me from achieving what you see on social media."

A strain on his life, he looks in the mirror countless times a day checking out how he looks – albeit bodybuilding can be a vanity driven activity, every time he is looking at himself, that reflection he sees is eating away at him.

"I enjoy being complimented, even though I can't see it in myself. It makes you feel great but when you come off your cycle or you have a bad workout, you can't help but feel disappointed in yourself.

"You set goals and when they become closer, you set new ones, so you get that feeling of accomplishment. I used to tell myself I'd be satisfied at 250 lbs but then that goal arrived and I still felt fat in the mirror, my arms were not big enough. Then I decided I want to be 270 lbs but leaner."

He can still work a full-time job but his mind is constantly thinking about how he can increase the size of his muscles and he ridicules himself if the results are not what he desires, despite boasting a bodyweight not too dissimilar to current Mr. Olympia Phil Heath.

From the outside looking in, you'd be forgiven for thinking this is just a young man trapped in a realm of delusion. He does not want help and he does not think he needs help, an alarming prospect.

"No I don't really think there is much benefit seeing a doctor or medical professional. It's not like there are support groups for it or medicine for it. I still believe that it's healthier than anorexia

or just eating as a coping mechanism."

He is caught up in a world where there is no realistic end goal, Rory Hodges, a personal trainer (body transformation specialist) and trainee life coach from Cornwall believes that sustainable planning and smart goals must be established to treat muscle dysmorphia.

"First of all, figure out their reasons. Why are they wanting to get to where they are getting? Is there any hidden value to their constant need to look better?"

"They have to learn to almost love themselves a little. And I don't mean arrogant. But get them to see that what they are doing in the gym currently is affecting their lifestyle for the better."

Rory is also adamant that it is destructive to compare yourself to others, something that the anonymous interviewee struggles with.

"I compare myself to others on Instagram mostly. I believe in my head I can be better than them."

His view conflicts with recent revelations that a popular Instagram fitness model, Devin Zimmerman, under his pseudonym Devin Physique has admitted to using photoshop to make himself look bigger and better than he is in person.

The expectations set by this paradigm blur the lines of what is reality and what is fiction, they fool people into believing that a fake body image is achievable.

A damning indictment of the often understated severity of muscle dysmorphia, he claims: "I feel like in life I will never be content with how I look."



A leg progress picture from after his first steroid cycle



A transformation picture from before he started lifting and afterwards