

ANDROPAUSE

Male menopause is no myth

by Jacob Teitelbaum, MD

Not feeling like yourself lately? Do you have less energy than you used to, both in and out of the bedroom? Are you gaining weight even though your eating habits haven't changed? If so, you could be suffering from the effects of declining androgen levels, a condition called andropause.

HOW DOES ANDROPAUSE HAPPEN?

Androgens are a group of sex hormones found primarily in men, with testosterone being the most well known. They help kick-start puberty and play a vital role in the development of the male body. Androgens are responsible for masculine characteristics like that brawny muscle tone, burly beard, and deep macho voice. Nearly all testosterone is produced in the testes, and it's essential to sexual function.

But during the aging process, your body produces less and less testosterone. For most men, the decline starts around the age of 30, and continues at a rate of about one to two percent a year. While that might not seem like much, over time it could be enough to bring about some unwanted physical, mental, and emotional changes. By the time you approach 50, you may already be experiencing the symptoms of andropause—sometimes called male menopause. In fact, low testosterone is so prevalent that 40 percent of men over the age of 45 are considered to have “low T.”

THE SIGNS OF ANDROPAUSE

When you think about testosterone, sex is probably the first thing that comes to mind. And for good reason: Testosterone is a big part of a man's sexual function. It contributes to everything from feeling sexual desire to achieving an erection to reaching orgasm. So it's no surprise that low libido and erectile dysfunction are signs that you may be experiencing andropause. But sexual desire and function are far from the only issues caused by low T.

Low testosterone can have a huge impact on all aspects of your life. Some indications you may notice when looking in the mirror, including a few extra pounds around your waistline or a fatigued face staring back at you. Your emotional health can suffer without an ample amount of androgens, as well. Feelings of depression or irritability can creep in as testosterone declines. Many men who transition into andropause also report problems with memory and concentration. Unfortunately, these symptoms can worsen over the years as testosterone keeps dwindling.

And just because your testosterone levels are in the “normal” range doesn't mean they are healthy. It simply means you aren't in the lowest two-and-a-half percent of the population.

THE DANGERS OF LOW T

For some men, a dip in androgen levels may bring about even more severe problems—especially metabolic syndrome, a condition that includes high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and a tendency to develop diabetes.



Other problems include a significant decline in muscle mass, called sarcopenia. That not only leads to frailty and makes you susceptible to falling, but it could rob you of your independence later in life. Your bones could also suffer since andropausal men tend to experience decreased bone mineral density and increased fracture risk. Even more alarming, one study showed that men with the lowest total testosterone were 40 percent more likely to die than those with higher levels.

HOW TO MANAGE SYMPTOMS

The first step to getting a handle on andropause is to focus on your everyday habits. If your diet is filled with unhealthy fats and ultra-processed foods, then you're surely setting yourself up for a drop in androgen hormones. Instead, opt for foods like fatty fish high in omega-3s, avocados, berries, and eggs. All of these healthful foods can raise serum testosterone.

Your bad habits aren't helping either. Consuming moderate to high amounts of alcohol can have a detrimental effect on testosterone production. Cigarette smoking has been shown to lower testosterone, too, not to mention the danger it poses to your cardiovascular system.

It's also important to get regular exercise. A recent eight-week study showed that high-intensity interval training (HIIT) significantly modulated the balance between testosterone and the stress hormone cortisol while improving physical fitness. And don't forget to get a good night's sleep. Poor sleep quality, too little sleep, and sleep apnea can all reduce testosterone levels.

NATURAL SOLUTIONS

Conventional treatment for low T typically involves testosterone replacement therapy, which can be expensive and sometimes risky. In fact, getting testosterone injections can

actually make your health problems worse, not better. But there are plenty of ways to ramp up your androgen levels without having to resort to prescription measures.



This herbal adaptogen has been used by Ayurvedic physicians for centuries, largely because of its rejuvenating and stress-relieving properties. In modern-day studies, ashwagandha has also been shown to be effective at regulating hormones like testosterone, mitigating stress, increasing energy levels, and improving concentration. During one of these studies that involved a group of overweight andropausal men between the ages of 40 and 70, Australian researchers found that a daily dose of ashwagandha resulted in a significant uptick in two important male hormones—DHEA and testosterone. In another study that appeared in *Health Science Reports*, investigators found that the herb not only increased testosterone levels but also boosted desire, making it a perfect way to combat the sexual side effects of andropause. For clinically effective results, opt for a dairy-free supplement that contains a proprietary ashwagandha formulation called EP35, which is standardized to contain at least 35 percent withanolides—the secret sauce that gives this herb robust effects.



A potent antioxidant and anti-inflammatory, Korean red ginseng has

been shown to increase testosterone levels and boost energy. These beneficial effects were shown in a recent randomized, controlled trial of 72 overweight men with metabolic syndrome, a condition closely linked to low T. Participants who supplemented with red ginseng every day for four weeks saw a significant increase in their total testosterone concentrations compared to those in the placebo group. But to replicate these beneficial effects in your own life, it's important to check your supplement label to make sure it contains Korean red ginseng HRG80.



Vitamin D is essential for good health. But a deficiency can lead to all sorts of issues, from muscle weakness to brittle bones—and, you guessed it, low testosterone. The benefits of supplementing with vitamin D were revealed in a study of 165 men with low levels of both testosterone and vitamin D. The men were divided into two groups, with one getting a high daily dose of D and the other a placebo. After one year, circulating D concentrations had increased significantly in the supplement group. This led to a meaningful rise in total testosterone levels, bioactive testosterone, and free testosterone levels. In contrast, there was no significant change in any testosterone measure for the placebo group. ■



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