



Women's Health Connection

What You Should Know About ...

ANDROPAUSE (MALE MENOPAUSE)

Most everyone is familiar with the term menopause, which refers to the end of a woman's reproductive years. What some people don't know is that men also go through a similar transition, known as andropause or male menopause, during their later years. In both cases, the transition is associated with hormone deficiencies and tends to coincide with other age-related declines. Fortunately, appropriate hormone treatment generally provides symptom relief, and also tends to delay other age-related illnesses or conditions.

Definition

Andropause is not considered to be a disease, nor is it the same as the "mid-life crisis" some men exhibit as they age. Most mid-life crises occur 10 to 20 years before andropause and may be indicative of the beginning of the decline, similar to symptoms of pre- or perimenopause in women.

The existence of andropause has been debated for years, but has recently gained recognition as a very real physiological state of hormone deficiency. Yet there is still controversy over an exact definition. Some practitioners define andropause as the inability to have a penile erection; others associate it with a marked decline in hormone levels. What most agree on is that andropause is the result of a very gradual, age-related decline in hormones such as testosterone, DHEA, and others.

Between the ages of 25 and 50, men's testosterone levels tend to decrease by approximately 10% per decade, yielding over a 50% reduction by the time they reach their 60s. Because it is such a slow decline and men's

responses to it vary widely, andropause is difficult to detect. The fact that men generally do not discuss symptoms as readily as women also makes it more difficult to diagnose.

During this period of testosterone decline, men's estrogen hormone levels tend to increase by almost 50%, drastically altering their hormone balance. This change in the ratio may help explain why many men begin to feel more family-oriented and nurturing as they age.

Factors that accelerate the decline of hormones such as testosterone and DHEA include:

- excess weight, especially abdominal obesity
- illness, disease, or other stressful events
- tobacco consumption
- drug or alcohol abuse
- depression or mental illness
- reduced sexual activity.

Common Symptoms

Similar to menopause, the effects of andropause are not uniform—each man's response to it is unique. That said, there are commonly reported symptoms, many of which are considered part of the "normal" aging process (see chart on next page), but which are also accelerated by a testosterone deficiency.

Symptoms of testosterone deficiency tend to fall into one of four categories: physical, cardiovascular, mental, or sexual, with some of them overlapping. For example, feeling too weak or tired to engage in sex could be related to impaired cardiovascular health, feelings of insecurity, and decreased libido, all of which may be related to a testosterone deficiency.

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One of the most troubling symptoms men encounter as they age is an enlarged prostate. The prostate gland goes through a second growth spurt as men reach their 40s, 50s, or 60s, often resulting in benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH). As the prostate grows, it pushes on the bladder and urethra, causing mild to severe urinary discomforts such as increased frequency of urination, especially at night; difficulty initiating urination; decreased urinary force; and the sensation of a full bladder, even after urinating.

Current medical research indicates that low testosterone levels may be associated with BPH, especially when coupled with elevated estrogen hormone levels.

Treatment Options

With increasing life spans, the number of years that a man might live with hormone deficiencies also increases. The earlier that a hormone imbalance is detected and treated, the better. Hormone supplements can provide symptom relief, while delaying other age-related declines.

Because andropause has not been studied as much as menopause, some health-care practitioners may not suggest hormone treatment unless you ask about it. Some practitioners may also maintain a lingering concern over testosterone supplements, primarily due to past abuse by athletes who injected synthetic steroids to build muscle mass.

The testosterone treatments available today—such as oral capsules, sublingual lozenges, patches, creams, and gels—can be quite effective and easy to use, with minimal side effects. The benefits they offer include:

- improved energy and overall well-being
- increased strength and stamina
- enhanced mood and self-esteem
- improved concentration and memory
- enhanced libido and sexual function.

If you decide to pursue hormone therapy, be aware of the differences between conventional

Symptoms Associated with Andropause

Physical

- Balding head
- Reduced body hair, especially armpits and genital area
- Decreased muscle mass, with increased body fat
- Reduced strength and stamina
- Feeling weak or tired
- Decreased testicle size
- Enlarged prostate
- Urinary discomfort and/or difficulties

Cardiovascular

- Increased abdominal fat, increasing risk of heart attack
- Increased insulin, cholesterol, and triglyceride levels
- Elevated blood pressure
- Diminished coronary artery elasticity
- Weakening of the heart muscle

Mental

- Moodiness, irritability, insecurity
- Inner unrest
- Lack of concentration
- Memory failures
- Reduced intellect and critical thinking

Sexual

- Decreased sex drive and arousal
- Reduced organ sensitivity or pleasure
- Fewer orgasms
- Erectile dysfunction

hormone therapy and natural hormone supplements. Natural hormones are those that are bio-chemically identical to the hormones found in your body. As such, their effects in the body are the same as the effects of the hormones they are supplementing.

Hormones in some conventional hormone therapy are not identical to human hormones. In addition, most conventional hormone therapy comes in just a few standardized doses, which may or may not include the optimum dose for your needs. Natural hormone supplements are often custom compounded, which allows for precise dosing and potency, and tailoring each prescription for each individual's needs.

With any hormone treatment, it is important to work with your healthcare practitioner to maintain the proper hormone balance. This is especially true if you also use other supplements or herbs, as they may interact with your medications, including hormone treatments.

For more information about hormone therapy, please see <http://www.womensinternational.com>