Have you lost your bounce?

Low Testosterone or Testosterone Deficiency Syndrome (TDS) is often missed by doctors because patients might not discuss symptoms they may be experiencing. Approximately 20% of men over the age of 50 have lower than normal levels of testosterone. Evidence suggests that only a small percentage of men with TDS are diagnosed and treated.

As you get older your body changes. Perhaps you aren’t as lively as you once were, or you might have put on some weight? Sometimes this is a normal part of ageing but not always. You may be experiencing symptoms of low testosterone.

What is testosterone?

Testosterone is an androgen hormone, which plays a vital role in male sexual development before birth and during puberty.

The functions of testosterone

- Forms and maintains the sexual organs
- Helps produce sperm
- Regulates sex drive (libido)
- Promotes male sex characteristics such as voice deepening and growth patterns
- Facilitates muscle growth, bone development and maintenance

What are the symptoms of low testosterone?

Low testosterone can be divided into sexual and non-sexual symptoms:

Sexual Symptoms
- Erectile dysfunction
- Low libido
- Weaker and fewer erections
- Reduced sexual activity
- Infertility

Non-Sexual Symptoms
- Decrease in beard and body hair growth
- Loss of muscle bulk
- Thinning of the bones
- Increased body fat
- Decreased energy levels (fatigue)
- Depression

What are the causes?

There are a number of reasons why testosterone levels may decline. Symptoms may occur quickly or gradually, sometimes taking years to become noticeable.

The decrease in normal testosterone production can be classified as:

- Primary, when the problem is in the testes – not functioning normally or III cannot respond to stimulation from the brain.
- Secondary, when the problem is related to the hypothalamus or III pituitary – produce insufficient hormone amounts to regulate III testosterone levels

Changes in sex hormone binding globulin (SHBG), which binds to testosterone, can also affect the amount of testosterone available.
Who is most at risk?

Erectile dysfunction

About one third of men with erectile dysfunction (ED) may also have low testosterone levels. If you have ED, it could be worth getting your testosterone levels checked. This is particularly important if your ED treatment doesn't appear to be working very well.

Type 2 diabetes

Studies show there is a link between type 2 diabetes and low testosterone. If you have type 2 diabetes and notice other symptoms, you could also be suffering from low testosterone. Diabetes can also cause ED, and approximately 50% of diabetic patients have low testosterone.

Heart problems

It is not yet clear if low testosterone causes, or is a result of, heart problems. However, if you have coronary heart disease, hardening of the arteries or high blood pressure, you could be at risk of developing low testosterone.

How is low testosterone diagnosed?

Your doctor will enquire about your medical history and you may be asked to complete some questionnaires. The Ageing Male Symptoms test (AMS) or Androgen Deficiency in Ageing Males test (ADAM) will give the doctor an indication of the extent of the symptoms you are experiencing. You will also need to undergo a physical examination and your doctor will call for blood levels of testosterone to be tested. This needs to be done in the morning between 8 and 10 am.

Your doctor will also evaluate your prostate health by asking you to complete the International Prostate Symptoms score (IPSS). He will also do a physical examination of your prostate and request a Prostate Specific Antigen level (PSA Test).

Depending on the state of your general health, other associated medical conditions related tests like blood sugar and blood cholesterol, might also be called for.

How is low testosterone treated?

Along with lifestyle changes, such as healthy eating and regular exercise, there are various treatment options. Discuss these with your doctor to determine the best course of treatment for you. If testosterone therapy is right for you, your doctor may suggest a treatment programme using injections.

Restoring testosterone levels may improve your sex drive, energy levels and general sense of health and wellbeing. If you suffer from ED, you may also find that testosterone treatment improves ED too, even if you’re already taking medication to treat it.

Please Note: This is an information leaflet only and should not be used for diagnostic purposes. For more information on low testosterone, diagnosis and treatment, speak to your healthcare professional.

Bibliography

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