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Low Testosterone in Men

What's all the buzz?

You've heard the commercials on television advertising drugs used to treat low testosterone (low T). How do you know if you or your loved one should be concerned? Here's some information that will help put you in the know.

Low testosterone is a condition that affects more than 5 million American men.¹ It's caused by lower-than-normal blood levels of a hormone called testosterone. It can be treated, but only those who have low blood levels are treated. The treatment is not given to everyone who would like to increase their sexual performance.

What are the symptoms of low testosterone?

There are 2 types of low testosterone symptoms. Specific symptoms are more likely to be caused by low testosterone than anything else. Nonspecific symptoms can be caused by lots of other things too. Specific symptoms in adult men include

- Loss of underarm and pubic hair
- Less need for shaving
- Loss in height
- Hot flashes and sweats
- Broken bone caused by a small amount of trauma
- Low bone mineral density (BMD)
- Decreased interest in sex
- Decreased spontaneous erections

Nonspecific symptoms include:

- Decreased muscle strength
- Increased body fat
- Decreased energy, motivation, self-confidence
- Feeling sad or blue (depressed)
- Irritability
- Sleep disturbance
- Poor concentration and memory



What is testosterone?

Testosterone is a hormone (chemical) produced mostly by the testes in men. The adrenal gland also produces small amounts. In women, the ovaries and the adrenal gland produce small amounts.

Testosterone is the hormone that turns boys into men. During puberty, testosterone

- Deepens the voice
- Causes growth of facial hair (beard) and body hair
- Increases height
- Increases muscle mass
- Increases the size of the testes and the penis

During the adult years, testosterone

- Helps maintain bone and muscle strength
- Helps produce sperm cells
- Maintains a man's interest in sex (sex drive or libido)
- Helps maintain normal mood and energy level

If this sounds like you, what should you do?

If you have a lot of these symptoms, talk with your doctor. He/she will take a medical history and do a physical exam. Your doctor will also order a testosterone blood test to find out if you really have a low level. If you have a low level of testosterone, your doctor will run other tests to try and find out what is causing it. These may include:

- LH and FSH levels (other hormones)
- Prolactin, another hormone
- Iron saturation
- Pituitary function test
- MRI or CT scan
- Chromosome analysis
- Bone mineral density (BMD)

What treatments are available?

Doctors use different treatments for men with low testosterone. One option is to treat the condition that is causing the low testosterone. Another option is to give the patient testosterone. Testosterone is available in several forms:

- Injection into a muscle
- Pill that is swallowed (not recommended)
- Tablet that is attached to the gum
- Gel applied daily on the skin
- Patch applied nightly on the skin
- Pellets inserted under the skin

Each of these treatments has advantages and disadvantages. Be sure to learn about them before deciding which type of treatment is right for you.

Additional Information

You can find reliable information about low testosterone at these 2 websites:

- WebMD®'s Men's Health Testosterone Directory: <http://men.webmd.com/testosterone-directory>
- MedlinePlus® Low Testosterone Tutorial: <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/tutorials/lowtestosterone/htm/index.htm>

References

1. Araujo AB, Esche GR, Kupelian V, et al. Prevalence of symptomatic androgen deficiency in men. *J Clin Endocrinol Metab.* 2007;92:4241-4247.
2. Bhasin S, Cunningham GR, Hayes FJ, et al. Testosterone therapy in men with androgen deficiency syndromes: an Endocrine Society clinical practice guideline. *J Clin Endocrinol Metab.* 2010;95:2536-2559.