

HORMONES AND GRUMPY OLD MEN



As women grow older they reach a point in their lives called menopause when their hormone production decreases rapidly leading to a number of symptoms and consideration of hormone replacement.

Men also have a decrease in their hormone levels which is more gradual from their peak in their 20's and 30's. The male hormone testosterone is produced in the testicles and leaks into the blood stream where it is carried through the circulation to have its effect. Male hormone levels can actually decrease by 1-2% per year. Approximately 10% of men aged 40-60 and 30% of men aged 60-80 have significantly decreased hormone levels.

This is often accompanied by an increase in weight particularly fat around the abdomen. It is rather like the chicken and the egg as to which comes first. While the decrease in hormone levels can lead to an increase in weight, the increase in weight can also lead to hormones being taken up in the fat and therefore being less effective.

The symptoms that are likely to develop from a low hormone level are psychological, physical and sexual.

Psychological symptoms may consist of tiredness, depressed mood, irritability, poor concentration and reduce short term memory.

Physical symptoms consist of weakness, muscle and joint pains, thinning of bones (Osteoporosis), sweating and hot flushes, dryness of the skin, reduced muscle mass and strength, increased abdominal girth and obesity, breast enlargement and reduced body and facial hair.

Sexual symptoms involve reduced libido (desire), erectile dysfunction and disturbances of ejaculation.

Testosterone deficiency is diagnosed by taking a full history and examination and blood tests

including hormone levels measured on two separate days in the morning when the level is at its highest. It is also necessary to have a prostate check as if there is a possibility of prostate cancer then hormone replacement may worsen the situation. In fact, reducing testosterone levels is one method of treatment for prostate cancer.

While a number of men may show "normal" hormone levels it is impossible to know what the level used to be at its peak and therefore what the relative reduction might now be.

Testosterone deficiency can be treated with replacement using capsules, skin patches, creams and gels and injections. If treatment is given then the man will require regular blood test follow-ups including prostate specific androgen (PSA).

It is important to note that this is replacement of deficient levels of hormone and that the doses given to replace testosterone will not have similar effects to massive doses of testosterone sometimes taken to markedly increase muscle bulk as may be used by some body builders. It is important that the dosage is personalised and monitored. So called "testosterone rage" appears to only occur in men in whom extreme doses have been taken.

Testosterone replacement may turn "grumpy old men" into "nice guys".



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Testosterone

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