



TESTOSTERONE

the *other* female hormone

It's the alpha male hormone, but did you know testosterone is essential for women's energy levels, sex drive and even happiness? We lift the lid on the hormone you didn't know you were missing

How are you feeling today? A little tired, perhaps, lacking enthusiasm or missing your usual bounce? While it's normal for energy levels to ebb and flow, there's a good chance that persistent low mood and feeling generally lacking in vitality are symptoms of low testosterone.

It turns out this male hormone is pretty important to the fairer sex as well. While we only produce about five per cent of the daily amount men do, we need testosterone to support muscle and bone strength – as well as boost energy levels, feelings of wellbeing and, just as importantly, our libido. It's also linked to memory, mental sharpness and self-confidence, which affects all areas of our lives, from friendships and romantic partnerships to career progression (could it be the whiff of testosterone we detect when we talk about the smell of success?). Simply put, testosterone is essential for our physical, mental and emotional wellbeing.

In fact, hormone specialist Dr Marion Gluck (www.mariongluckclinic.com) argues that testosterone is very much a *female hormone*. 'It's as female a hormone as oestrogen is a male hormone,' she says. 'Both sexes have both hormones, it's just the amount that differs. A man of 60 will have

'Testosterone is as female a hormone as oestrogen is a male hormone'



more oestrogen than a woman of 60, because testosterone converts to oestrogen but not the other way around.'

Women are at a disadvantage in terms of testosterone from the get-go: being women, we produce less naturally, but the level that we do maintain drops off as we age – with it often getting crucially low around the mid-life stage. 'Levels begin to decline at the age of 20 and there's a 50 per cent fall after the menopause,' says Professor John Studd, consultant gynaecologist at the London PMS and Menopause Clinic, who has been an advocate for testosterone supplementation in post-menopausal women for more than 30 years. 'The benefits are clear,' he says. 'I give almost all my HRT patients testosterone as well. As a result, they experience improved libido, strength, energy, mood and self-confidence, less depression and fewer headaches.'

'Testosterone could be key to achieving optimum health and vitality after the age of 40,' agrees Dr Kathy Maupin, author of *The Secret Female Hormone: How Testosterone Replacement Can Change Your Life* (Hay House, £10.99). 'I know it's the reason I can get up every day. Nothing else in mainstream medicine worked for me when I found myself overweight, fatigued and plagued by foggy ▶



thinking. I believe every woman over 40 needs to know this. It's why I wrote the book.'

Could you be testosterone-deficient?

Symptoms of testosterone deficiency include headaches, depression and decreased energy, wellbeing, self-confidence and libido. Certain medical conditions, such as absent periods, over-production of the hormone prolactin and hysterectomy also affect testosterone levels adversely. However, there are women with testosterone deficiency to whom these circumstances don't apply, according to Professor Studd. 'They may be perimenopausal [the stage before the menopause], or even young women who have difficulty reaching orgasm, which is often related to low testosterone levels.'

If you're concerned that you may have low testosterone levels, see your GP, who will discuss your symptoms and may take a blood test. 'I make a judgment based on the woman's story,' says Professor Studd. 'Measuring blood levels can be confusing, as some women have unmeasurable levels of testosterone, yet don't have any symptoms, while others have levels that are in the normal range, but still suffer debilitating symptoms.'

If you feel something isn't right, persist, advises Dr Maupin, who herself takes bioidentical (plant-based) testosterone 'pellets' and credits them with resolving her low-testosterone symptoms. 'The suggestion is loss of libido, confidence and general lust for life are "just the way it is" for women over 40, but my book challenges that perception,' she says. 'The feedback I've had has been amazing. Women who were depressed to the point of feeling their lives were not worth living now feel they have a future.'

Prescribing testosterone

Testosterone-only prescriptions include gels, patches and implants. Another option is tibolone – a tablet form of HRT that includes testosterone. Both patches and implants used to be licensed for women in the UK, but licences have since been withdrawn for 'commercial reasons' (although some private clinics have sourced licensed implants from outside the UK). Since then, prices have increased considerably. Both the expense and lack of licence make some GPs reluctant to prescribe the products.



'Testosterone gave me back my lust for life'

Angie Macdonald, 49, a freelance writer (www.writehealth.co.uk) who lives in London with her civil partner Yang-May, 51, felt she'd lost her mojo before she started using testosterone gel

'I'd been having menopausal symptoms for years without realising what they were, but by 2012, they'd got too bad to ignore. My periods were irregular and I was having hot flushes and night sweats. My mood was permanently low. My libido had been fluctuating, but it got to the stage where I didn't want Yang-May to touch me.'

'In 2012, I persuaded my GP to do a blood test. It showed I was in the throes of the menopause, with low oestrogen and progesterone and very low testosterone. She prescribed an HRT preparation with oestrogen and a synthetic form of progestogen. There was no testosterone, but she was convinced it would help.'

'Within days, the hot flushes and night sweats disappeared. But my libido didn't improve and I started to gain weight. After two months, I returned to my GP. I asked for bioidentical hormones [hormones synthesised to identically resemble the natural hormones produced in the body], but she wasn't prepared to prescribe them. She referred me to the menopause clinic at King's College Hospital, London, where I was prescribed bioidentical oestrogen patches, progesterone capsules and testosterone gel.'

'Within weeks, I felt happier, more confident and energetic and sex is pleasurable again. It's given me my lust back for life.'



'It's a scandal that we have this female hormone that's not being prescribed'

Guidelines from the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologist state: 'The place of testosterone in ovary-intact women with low libido requires further evaluation. Testosterone replacement may be associated with adverse clinical and metabolic side effects and the long-term consequences are unknown.'

However, Professor Studd and health professionals in his school of thought are adamant about the pros of prescription testosterone. 'It's a scandal that we have this female hormone that shouldn't be expensive and it's not being prescribed,' says Professor Studd. 'I've prescribed women oestrogen and testosterone privately, then they've gone to see their own GP, who's prescribed the oestrogen, but not the testosterone.'

'It's because they're not familiar with it and it's not licensed for women, so they're happy to have an excuse not to prescribe it,' he adds. 'Some doctors think the libido of a middle-aged woman is irrelevant. It's a tragedy, because testosterone works.'