

Manly MENopause?

The truth about andropause

by Kim Erickson

Have you been feeling a little hot under the collar lately, but seldom under the sheets? Is your midsection getting softer by the day? Are your mood swings and night sweats enough to drive your partner to the couch?

I know what you're thinking: It must be menopause. But wait a minute, you're a man! Could you also be in for a "change of life?"

ANDRO WHAT?

Although male menopause has historically been brushed aside as myth, recent studies are giving the condition credibility. Here's what you need to know: Scientists have long known that a man's testosterone level begins a slow downhill slide as early as age 30, dropping about one percent a year after the age of 50. Add that to the fact that other sex hormones and brain chemicals also begin to fluctuate, and middle-aged men can quite possibly look forward to an array of andropause symptoms, including a loss of muscle mass, fatigue, depression, loss of libido, erectile dysfunction (ED), and

even hot flashes. But not having enough testosterone can also increase your risk of some life-threatening conditions such as cardiovascular disease, cognitive decline, obesity, and type 2 diabetes.

THE T FACTOR

Testosterone is made in the testes and it's the most important reproductive hormone in men. In fact, it's the hormone responsible for that deep voice, those burly muscles, and your cool hipster beard. This super-hormone also supports healthy bones, muscle mass, and red blood cell production. It even dictates where body fat is stored.

If you suspect your levels are low, get checked. Initially, your doctor will measure your total testosterone using a simple blood test. Normal levels fall between 300-1,000 ng/dl. A reading below 250 indicates low testosterone levels. Other tests may also be conducted to measure the amount of free testosterone and another hormone called dehydroepiandrosterone (DHEA)—a hormone produced by the adrenals that serves as a precursor to testosterone.

UNDER THE HOOD

One of the most frustrating side effects of low testosterone levels can often be found in the bedroom. Testosterone is central to a man's sexual response, including the mechanics of triggering an erection. In fact, testosterone modulates nearly every step involved in gaining and maintaining an erection, from the nerves in the pelvis to the smooth muscle and endothelial cells of the corpora cavernosa. This he-man hormone also regulates sexual desire and the timing



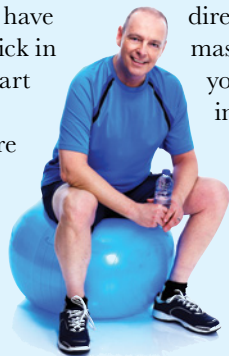
of the erectile process. Low testosterone levels can undermine performance and interfere with intimacy.

But that's not all. Erectile dysfunction can actually be one of the first indicators that you may have cardiovascular disease. Researchers at the University of Sheffield, U.K. have linked low testosterone to an uptick in atherosclerosis, hypertension, heart failure, and heart attack. This is because low testosterone levels are connected to insulin resistance, obesity, and diabetes. Each of these factors boosts the risk of cardiovascular disease.

SMARTER CHOICES

For men hitting midlife, it's often time for a diet and exercise tune-up. Whole unprocessed foods are the way to go when planning your diet. Focus on low-sugar fruits and non-starchy vegetables, as well as lean meats, fish high in omega-3 fatty acids, and healthy

fats like avocados or extra virgin olive oil. Steer clear of, or at least minimize, added sugars and carbohydrates. And since andropause can trigger weight gain, watch your portion size and try to refrain from snacking.



Exercise matters too. Since there is a direct relationship between muscle mass and testosterone, you can raise your testosterone levels by getting into a weight-lifting program. Studies show that as few as two sessions of strength training per week can increase muscle strength by more than 30 percent while also boosting bone density, speeding up metabolism, and pushing up production of testosterone and other sex hormones. Exercises that target several large muscle groups (like squats or bench presses) boost testosterone levels more than those that train isolated muscles (like curls). Just don't overdo it, especially if you are on a weight-loss diet. Over-training and

under-eating can also wreak havoc on testosterone production.

SUPPLEMENT THIS!

Maca is a Peruvian herb said to boost endurance, stamina, and sexual virility. It's used by both men and women to stimulate both libido and pelvic blood flow. But does it work?

A 12-week double-blind, placebo-controlled study found that healthy men who took the herb did indeed have an increase in desire. Earlier animal studies have found that maca also increases stamina and semen quality.



The key to maca's effectiveness are glucosinolates, natural plant compounds that help balance hormone levels, particularly testosterone. According to clinical trials, this compound not only aids men suffering



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1. Get enough sleep. Men produce most of their daily testosterone when they sleep. Set a regular bedtime and wake time, and watch the amount of caffeine you consume. If sleep apnea is a problem, have it treated.

2. Drink moderately. Alcohol has been shown to lower testosterone levels and inhibit the release of nitric oxide. Limit yourself to no more than two drinks per day.

3. Break a sweat. Exercise naturally increases testosterone levels. Strive to get at least 30 minutes of exercise daily. Doing what you enjoy, whether it's walking, weightlifting, playing sports, or riding a bike, can help you stick with it. As a bonus, exercise effectively lowers stress levels and improves mood.

from erectile dysfunction, it can also help healthy people who simply want to increase their libido. Research in the journal *Urology* shows that glucosinolates help to decrease the amount of time it takes to achieve and maintain an erection. For best results, seek out a supplement that provides a 4:1 extract of the maca root.

French Grape Seed Extract is rich in oligomeric proanthocyanidin complexes (OPCs) that provide powerful antioxidant and anti-inflammatory benefits. OPCs also inhibit an enzyme called aromatase that converts testosterone to estrogen. But grape seed extract works on numerous fronts to support good health in the midst of andropause. Studies show that the OPCs in grape seed extract increase adiponectin, a protein that regulates blood sugar, insulin, cholesterol, and inflammation, by an impressive 61 percent. One study by Dutch researchers also reports that grape seed extract can reduce the amount of calories you consume. And Spanish scientists note that, in addition to reducing food intake, the OPCs in grape seed extract specifically target belly fat—a boon for any guy looking to lose weight.



Grape seed extract OPCs have also been found to protect against age-related cognitive decline, and enhance memory and focus. It does this by preventing oxidative damage and inflammation that can cause structural changes to the brain as you age. But not all grape seed extracts deliver these results. Look for a tannin-free grape seed extract that provides low molecular weight OPCs to ensure that the molecules in the supplement are small enough to be absorbed and utilized by the body.

Omega-3s protect blood vessels thanks to two fatty acids, docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) and eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA). Numerous

studies show that these two omega-3s help reduce high blood pressure and triglyceride levels. They modulate many of the mechanisms of atherosclerosis, including inflammation, blood clotting, and platelet aggregation (stickiness). But you needn't take fish oil long-term before experiencing benefits. Omega-3s can bring immediate aid to your arteries. According to a 2010 trial at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, when 20 volunteers were fed a high-fat meal designed to dampen endothelial function and boost arterial stiffness, those who took 1,000 mg of fish oil after eating appeared to be protected against the dietary-induced damage. Of course, this doesn't give you an excuse to dive into a greasy burger and fries. It's simply an example of the protective properties fish oil has on your circulatory system.

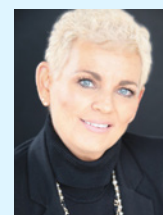


Red Ginseng
If performance is top of mind when it comes to andropause, a unique, highly concentrated, hydroponically grown red ginseng known as HRG80 may help reignite your passion and improve your capabilities. In one double-blind, placebo-controlled study of 45 men with ED, 60 percent of those who took red ginseng for eight weeks reported improvement in their symptoms compared to those taking a placebo. In a review of 28 studies of the herb's efficacy that appeared in the *British Journal of Clinical Pharmacology*, researchers concluded that red ginseng has hormonal effects similar to testosterone and may relax the smooth muscles of the corpus cavernosa.

Red ginseng has also been found to support a healthy cardiovascular system. A double-blind, randomized, placebo-controlled clinical trial published in the journal *Cardiovascular Therapies* found that red ginseng significantly improved flow-mediated vasodilation, which expands arteries in response to blood flow. This, in turn, improves how well the inner lining (the endothelium) of arteries functions. Another trial that appeared in the journal *Complementary Therapies in Medicine* reported a significant improvement in diastolic blood pressure (the bottom number), the stress hormone cortisol, and mitochondrial function. Bonus: The researchers also noted a boost in total testosterone! ■

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But the benefits of omega-3s don't stop there. These healthy fats also increase free testosterone by decreasing levels of sex hormone binding globulin (SHBG), improving testicular function, and may even enhance sperm quality. To truly reap all of the healthy advantages omega-3 fatty acids have to offer, it's smart to add an EPA/DHA supplement sourced from salmon to your routine every day.



Kim Erickson is a respected health and medical writer, and the editor-in-chief of *Good Health Lifestyles*. In addition, she is the author of *Drop Dead Gorgeous: Protecting Yourself from the Hidden Dangers of Cosmetics* and the co-author of *Living Lessons: My Journey of Faith, Love, and Cutting-Edge Cancer Therapy*.