



# IS TESTOSTERONE THE MISSING PUZZLE PIECE?

*Dr Shilpa McQuillan, who leads Berkshire Menopause Clinic in Henley-on Thames, explains how testosterone replacement can help*

**T**estosterone is often referred to as the 'male' hormone, but did you know it is also present in women. Levels gradually decrease around the menopause and can have negative influence on sex drive, energy, mood, sleep and concentration.

## Is testosterone the magic answer?

The short answer is maybe! There is good evidence testosterone works, and in the UK, it is currently recommended in those with persistent low sex drive, despite being on HRT. In young women or those who have had their ovaries removed, testosterone levels can drop suddenly. These women often benefit from early replacement. But not all women need extra testosterone. There may be other triggers for low sex drive such as relationship stresses and underlying health issues. Another common cause is vaginal dryness, making sex very uncomfortable. None of these will be resolved with testosterone. It is important you can talk through your concerns with your doctor.

## Is it worth me exploring testosterone?

Absolutely - for most women, HRT will resolve symptoms. The next step may be adjusting your dose or type of HRT. Did you know most oral HRTs in fact lower testosterone levels. Oral oestrogen increases the chemical Sex Hormone Binding Globulin. This mops up testosterone, reducing the amount circulating in your body. Changing to a patch, spray or gel may help this. If HRT alone does not help, it may be worth adding testosterone, which can be safely taken

alongside HRT. A three-month trial is often enough to see improvement. If this does not help, it is unlikely to be the solution.

## Do I need blood tests?

Treatment is usually based on symptoms alone. It is good practice to do a blood test before starting treatment and then occasionally, to check levels stay within female range. Outside of this range can potentiate side effects such as acne, local hair growth, or rarely, virilisation.

## Where can I get testosterone?

In the UK, testosterone is not currently licensed for women, but there are guidelines supporting its use. So why don't all NHS GP surgeries prescribe it? Many factors influence this - there may be prescribing restrictions or stock issues in your area. Some GPs prefer to refer to a specialist. This can be frustrating, but 'off-licence' prescribing falls outside of usual practice. A doctor's first aim is to cause no harm to patients, so they may seek specialist advice if it is unfamiliar territory.

## Take home message

Managing menopause symptoms should be personalised. If you feel your current treatments do not control your symptoms, speak with your doctor. We are here to help.

Visit [www.berkshireremopauseclinic.com](http://www.berkshireremopauseclinic.com) to contact Dr McQuillan and for patient resources.

● *Dr Shilpa MacQuillan is a British Menopause Society accredited specialist, GP, and community gynaecologist*

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