MEN'S HEALTH WEEK

Men's Midlife Health

Understanding testosterone deficiency



"Not all men experience testosterone deficiency but awareness matters. Many men delay seeking help, particularly when symptoms affect sexual wellbeing, mood or confidence."

Dr Ed Rainbow, Men's Mind GP

Introduction

The impact of male midlife hormones is not commonly spoken about and men often tell us they find it difficult to find accurate, evidence-based information to support themselves.

In fact, research indicates that 41% are too embarrassed to seek help, with around 35% waiting for over 2 years to do so.

Awareness of menopause and women's hormonal health has grown significantly in recent years. However, men's midlife health and testosterone deficiency are still far less understood and discussed.

Many men experience symptoms affecting energy, mood, sleep, concentration, confidence and sexual wellbeing but may dismiss these as "just getting older" or delay seeking support.

This guide explains:

- what testosterone is
- how testosterone deficiency can affect wellbeing
- common symptoms
- factors that can contribute
- what support and treatment options are available



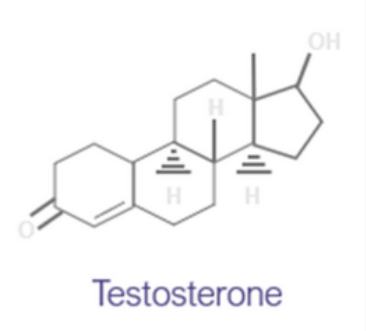
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What is testosterone?

Testosterone is a hormone made mainly in the testicles. Hormones are chemical messengers that help the body regulate important functions.

Testosterone plays a key role in:

- sexual health and libido
- muscle strength and body composition
- mood and confidence
- concentration and focus
- sleep and energy levels
- sperm production



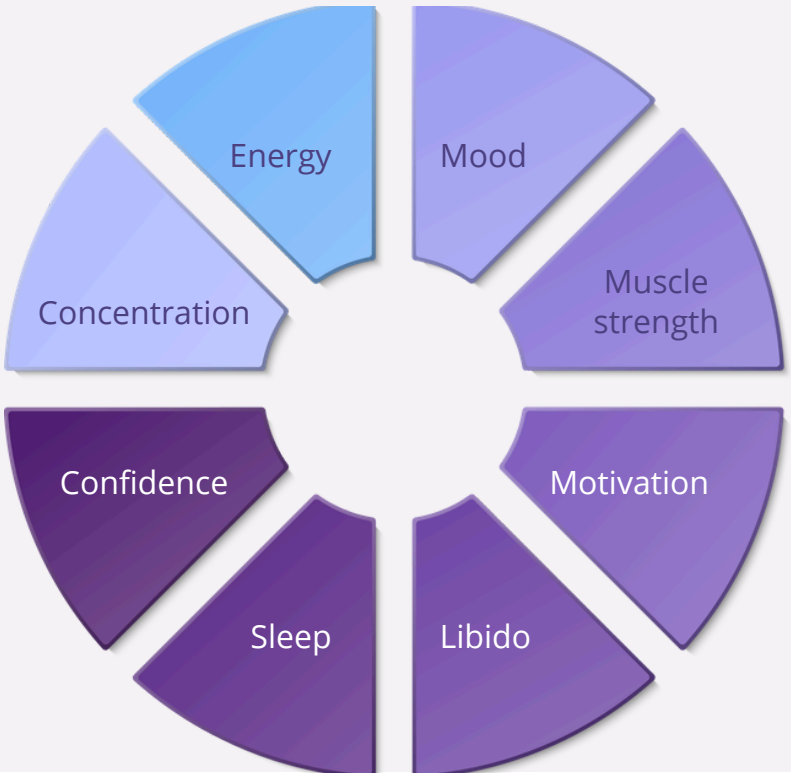
Testosterone levels naturally fluctuate throughout the day, with levels usually highest in the morning.

Why testosterone matters beyond sexual health

Although testosterone is often associated only with sex drive or erections, it affects many aspects of physical, emotional and mental wellbeing.

It helps the body and brain function effectively, including:

- concentration and focus
- confidence and motivation
- emotional regulation
- physical strength and stamina
- sleep regulation



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Is there a male menopause?

The term “male menopause” is often used online and in the media but it can be confusing.

Unlike menopause in women, men do not experience a complete stop in reproductive hormones in midlife. Instead, some men may develop:

- low testosterone levels
- testosterone deficiency
- symptoms linked to hormonal changes

The term “andropause” is sometimes used, although many clinicians prefer the term: **testosterone deficiency**

Symptoms vary between individuals

Not all men experience testosterone deficiency.
Research estimates vary considerably:

- some studies suggest this affects around 2% of men over 40
- others suggest higher numbers

Symptoms and severity can differ significantly between individuals.

Not all men experience testosterone deficiency but awareness matters.
Many men delay seeking help, particularly when symptoms affect sexual wellbeing, mood or confidence.

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Common symptoms

Physical symptoms:
Physical symptoms can develop gradually over time.
These may include:

- fatigue and low energy
- poor sleep
- reduced muscle strength
- weight gain, particularly around the abdomen
- reduced stamina
- increased sweating
- night sweats
- reduced exercise tolerance
- changes in body composition

Some men may also notice:

- loss of body hair
- reduced muscle mass
- increased fat around the chest or hips

Mental and cognitive symptoms:
Many men report symptoms affecting mood, confidence and thinking.
These can include:

- brain fog
- poor concentration
- forgetfulness
- irritability
- low mood
- reduced confidence
- feeling overwhelmed
- reduced motivation
- sadness or tearfulness

Some men may notice changes in:

- work performance
- decision-making
- patience and emotional regulation

Sexual symptoms:
Sexual symptoms are some of the strongest indicators of low testosterone.
These can include:

- reduced libido
- difficulty getting or maintaining erections
- fewer morning erections
- reduced sexual confidence
- reduced sexual arousal

Relationship difficulties may also occur where sexual desire changes significantly.

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What can contribute?

Testosterone deficiency is rarely caused by one thing. There are several factors that could contribute to lower testosterone levels.

Aging
Testosterone production and hormone regulation can become less efficient with age. However, symptoms should not automatically be dismissed as “just aging”.

Constant stress
Long-term stress was highlighted as one of the most common contributing factors.
Many men experiencing symptoms describe:

- constantly being “on”
- struggling to switch off
- excessive work pressure
- poor recovery time
- ongoing mental load

The body may prioritize the production of stress hormones over sex hormones during prolonged stress.

Poor sleep
Poor sleep quality and lack of recovery can affect:

- energy
- mood
- concentration
- hormone regulation

Weight gain and metabolic health
Being overweight, particularly carrying excess abdominal fat, is strongly associated with lower testosterone levels. Type 2 diabetes and metabolic syndrome were also highlighted as important factors.

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What can contribute?

Alcohol
Regular alcohol intake may lower testosterone levels and affect:

- sleep quality
- weight
- mood
- sexual functioning

Smoking and vaping
Smoking and vaping may contribute through stress responses and their broader impacts on health and circulation.

Some medications
Certain medications may affect testosterone levels, including some:

- antidepressants
- opioid pain medications
- blood pressure medications
- epilepsy medications

Medication changes should always be discussed with a healthcare professional.



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What can help?

Lifestyle changes can make a difference. Improving overall health can often help rather than focusing only on medication.

Stress management

Learning to switch off and recover is described as one of the most important strategies.
Examples included:

- mindfulness
- meditation
- breathing exercises
- journaling
- reducing “always on” behaviours





Sleep

Prioritizing sleep and recovery can help support overall wellbeing and hormone regulation.
Examples include:

- regular sleep routines
- reducing alcohol
- reducing screen time
- allowing recovery time

Exercise and movement



Regular movement can support:

- energy
- mood
- cardiovascular health
- muscle strength

Strength training and building muscle are considered particularly beneficial.
Examples included:

- walking
- resistance training
- bodyweight exercises
- regular moderate exercise

Reducing alcohol and stopping smoking

Reducing alcohol intake and stopping smoking or vaping may improve overall health and symptoms.

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What can help?

Nutrition

Experts encourage people to consider:

- eating more whole foods
- reducing processed foods
- increasing fiber
- focusing on balanced nutrition
- ensuring adequate hydration



Speaking to your GP

Prioritizing sleep and recovery can support overall wellbeing. Men experiencing ongoing symptoms should consider speaking to a healthcare provider (HCP).

A HCP may:

- discuss symptoms
- review lifestyle factors
- check for other causes
- arrange blood tests including testosterone levels where appropriate

Other conditions such as:

- thyroid problems
- anemia
- mental health conditions
- sleep problems

can sometimes cause similar symptoms.



Possible treatment options

Some men may benefit from testosterone replacement therapy (TRT) following medical assessment.
Treatment options may include:

- gels
- creams
- injections

TRT is not appropriate for everyone and requires medical supervision and monitoring.

Support should always be personalized and medically guided.

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Where to get help

Support options may include:

- your HCP
- occupational health
- employee assistance programs (EAP)
- mental health support services
- wellbeing programs

Remember

Many men experience changes affecting their physical, emotional and sexual wellbeing during midlife.

Awareness, early conversations and access to support can make a significant difference.



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