

Hot flashes, mood swings, poor memory, insomnia, increases in weight and cholesterol, decreases in libido, strength, stamina, increasing waist size ... do these sound familiar? Well except for the hot flashes, and sometimes even those happen, this is the picture of a male's change of life: Andropause. It is basically the decline of androgens or male sex hormones.

Testosterone increases lean muscle mass, libido, strength and stamina. It helps to control excess fat stores, blood sugar and cholesterol. It is a mood enhancer and often accounts for some of the aggressive tendencies of the adolescent and sometimes the grown male. As we age testosterone and some of the precursors to our sex hormones such as DHEA, androsteindione and pregnenolone decrease. Add to this the increase in stress which in some cases takes these precursors and diverts them to cortisol, our main stress hormone, and we have Andropause.

In men Testosterone and sperm production both happen in the testes. The body senses the need for increased production and the Hypothalamus tells the Pituitary to tell the testes start working. The hormones that the Pituitary uses are LH and FSH (both men and women have these). LH is Lutenizing Hormone and tells the testes to produce Testosterone. FSH is Follicle Stimulating Hormone and tells the testes to produce sperm. If there is low production of either sperm or Testosterone then we can narrow down the culprit by looking at the Testosterone levels, the precursor hormone levels, Cortisol or the stress hormone, LH and FSH levels with either blood or saliva testing.

Now, before we have a male equivalent of Suzanne Summers telling us to rush out and get some natural hormones or go to the body building supply house to get the latest thing to increase your testosterone remember that hormones are very sensitive. They work in a balance with other hormones. When you take hormones or other herbs and supplements to increase hormones you can disrupt the whole boat load, potentially worsening symptoms. Additionally, if you're under a great

deal of stress anything you take to increase your hormones will just be feeding your cortisol and the things you are taking will not be as effective as you want them to be.

The other thing that you need to worry about even if you try “manage it yourself” with supplements is that you can inadvertently increase your risk of hair loss or prostate problems and possibly even some hormone dependent cancers. Testosterone can be converted to DHT-dihydrotestosterone which has been linked with hair loss and enlarged prostate. Testosterone can also be converted into Estrogen, the strongest female hormone that can also cause major negative issues in a male body.

Unfortunately, many conventional medical doctors doing “anti-aging” medicine aren't making the effort to do it correctly and the patients are not being served well because of it. When you just start using Testosterone since your levels are low it may cause more harm than good if you are not checked to ensure the Testosterone is remaining Testosterone. Another issue arises when you use Testosterone if you have not addressed why it is low in the first place. As soon as you stop the Testosterone the levels decrease again and you are in the same boat or worse... When you take Testosterone, (or any other hormone for that matter) your body can create a resistance to it since it is given externally. The target tissues or organs in your body that the Testosterone is supposed to stimulate may start shutting down receptors or doorways to the Testosterone. It is better to stimulate the body to make its own hormone than to give a hormone in most cases.

That being said, there are things you can do to start in the right direction. Exercise is a natural way to support testosterone levels and decrease stress. Adequate sleep, water and proper food choices can also limit the stress response. Then, balancing hormones through nutritional or herbal formulas before going on to Testosterone supplementation is best unless there is a medical need to jump steps.

Andropause is a part of aging. Doing things that support your body's ability to maintain balance is the healthy way to go. Next week we'll talk about the female hormone system. Until then, it's your life... It's your health!

Doc Visconti has an Acupuncture & Natural Medicine clinic here in Clermont near the Citrus Tower. For more information on this topic or others visit www.docvisconti.com.