

Low Testosterone: To Treat or Not to Treat

Reduced sex drive. Lower energy. Mood swings. These are some of the symptoms men may experience when their testosterone levels are low. But is it a medical condition requiring treatment or the natural effects of aging?



Dr. Marshall Stein specializes in urology.

A Key Hormone

“Testosterone is probably the best-known male hormone because it’s what gives men their distinctive facial and body hair, muscular build and libido,” says Marshall Stein, M.D., a urologist affiliated with Memorial Hermann Southwest Hospital. “But it might be most famous for fueling men’s sex drive. So when testosterone levels go too low, men can experience a corresponding drop in muscle mass and strength along with decreased sexual interest and function.”

Men may experience these other symptoms as well:

- Anemia
- Depression
- Decreased bone density
- Low energy and fatigue
- Decline in cognitive function

Hormones Dip With Age

There are many reasons that men’s testosterone levels might drop. “Men experience a gradual reduction in testosterone as they age,” explains Dr. Stein. “In fact, about one out of three men older than age 45 has low testosterone.”

In addition to aging, a drop in testosterone can result from:

- Injury, trauma or infection of the testicles
- Radiation or chemotherapy
- Use of opiate painkillers, such as OxyContin
- Pituitary disease or cancer
- Liver or kidney disease, diabetes, obesity or HIV/AIDS

A Confusing Condition

There’s no medical consensus on whether low testosterone should be treated. Some experts suggest treatment isn’t needed unless the man’s sexual desire has dropped or he’s experiencing erectile dysfunction. But other research shows that most men with these sexual problems actually have normal testosterone levels. “Other factors such as certain medicines, stress or depression, high blood pressure or nerve damage from diabetes could also be to blame,” Dr. Stein comments.

In addition, there’s no agreement on a healthy level of testosterone, and various medical associations have yet to agree on the level at which a man’s testosterone should be considered low. “Blood testosterone readings can vary in the same man from day to day,” acknowledges Dr. Stein.

If you have symptoms of low testosterone, talk with your doctor about whether to have your testosterone level checked.



GET YOUR LEVEL CHECKED

Get a referral to a urologist affiliated with Memorial Hermann Southwest. Call 713.456.5348.