

Keeping Men Vital After Age 40

by John C. Pittman, MD Medical Director
Carolina Center for Integrative Medicine

As men age, they may experience any one of a number of physical changes. These can include loss of energy, loss of muscle mass, increase in body fat, loss of libido, loss of mental focus, anxiety and depression, and erectile dysfunction. When several of these changes occur at the same time, they can add up to a very disheartening situation. Fortunately, with the help of an integrative medical approach, one can turn this situation around and avoid a “biological midlife crisis.”

When we examine the underlying biology for the changes mentioned above, we find that most men experience a decline in various hormone levels as they age. In a recent study, the testosterone level of 70-year-old men was only ten percent of that of 25-year-old men. Between the ages 40 and 55, men can experience the male equivalent of menopause – or what is now referred to as andropause. An estimated 13 million men in the U.S. now have testosterone deficiency, and less than 5% of these will seek treatment.

Our clinical experience at the Carolina Center for Integrative Medicine has identified three biological keys to reversing the problems associated with andropause. The first key is to boost antioxidant power and lower the levels of free radicals that promote biological breakdown. The second key is to replenish key nutrients, ideally by correcting specific deficiencies of vitamins, minerals, fatty acids, amino acids, etc. The third key is raising and sustaining adequate levels of the hormones involved in maintaining healthy functioning.

All three goals can be reached through a nutritional approach guided by careful assessments that include a personal history and individualized lab testing. Our bodies depend on adequate antioxidant and nutrient levels for good health. Unfortunately, nutrient deficiencies are extremely common in the United States. Depending on the severity of the



deficiency, we may recommend initial supplementation with higher doses of specific nutrients. Over the longer term, diet and supplements can be used to maintain ideal cellular nutrient levels.

Male hormonal support, the third goal, is critical to keeping men vital. Simply put, hormones are cellular messengers that assist cells in functioning in a more efficient way. As hormone levels diminish, the efficiency of cell function declines. The solution is to reestablish hormone levels that support optimal cellular function and vitality. With the right hormonal support, many symptoms of andropause resolve very rapidly.

Among the hormones most often deficient in men suffering from andropause is testosterone. A lack of this hormone typically shows up as decreased energy, low libido, fatigue, depressed mood, and decreased muscle mass/strength. In addition, some men suffer from other conditions that put them at higher risk for testosterone deficiency – notably high blood pressure, diabetes, high cholesterol, obesity, HIV, and the chronic use of pain medications.

If laboratory testing reveals low levels of testosterone, then treatments to help raise this level can result in dramatic improvements in energy, cognitive function, muscle strength and sexual functioning. For men under 50, we typically start with herbal and other natural products that help turn back on testosterone production and in many cases these will work quite well. For men over 50,

or if herbal therapies aren't working very well, actual replacement with testosterone itself is the most effective treatment. Both commercial and compounded bio-identical testosterone gels are available. These gels are readily absorbed through the skin and promote an optimal blood level.

If gels are working well, but the hassle of a daily application is challenging to maintain, or we are unable to get blood levels to an optimal point, then we use a long-lasting testosterone replacement called Testopel®. This treatment uses tiny testosterone pellets (each about the size of a grain of rice) that are placed just underneath the skin at the top of the buttock.

Testopel has emerged as an effective and painless alternative to gels as treatment is needed only twice each year. Patients using Testopel report improved memory, sharper focus, better concentration and increased libido as well as improvement in confidence and self-esteem, and increased muscle strength, stamina and endurance. Considering a man's lifestyle and personal preferences, a single Testopel treatment once every six months is often the best way to boost lagging testosterone levels.

For more information, please contact the Raleigh-based Carolina Center for Integrative Medicine at 919-571-4391, or visit www.carolinacenter.com.

