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Male Menopause: Myth or Reality

'Male menopause' is the more common term for andropause, and may be a misleading and often overused term. It suggests that older men experience a similar biological response to that that can affect women during menopause - but, is this really the case?

The symptoms often associated with andropause include:

- mood swings and irritability
- loss of muscle mass and reduced ability to exercise
- fat redistribution, such as developing a large belly or 'man breasts' ([gynaecomastia](#))
- a general lack of enthusiasm or energy
- difficulty sleeping ([insomnia](#)) or increased tiredness
- poor concentration and short-term memory

Other andropause symptoms experienced by men with low testosterone include:

- Reduced sexual desire and activity
- Decreased spontaneous erections or erectile dysfunction
- Breast discomfort or swelling
- Infertility
- Height loss, low trauma fracture, or low bone mineral density
- Hot flushes or sweats

Myth

Unlike women, who have a dramatic reproductive hormone level plunge at menopause, testosterone levels start to slowly fall as men age, at a steady decline of about only 1% a year from around the age of 40. In fact, not all men experience 'menopause' at all.

This, then, is not comparable to the menopause process that all women experience.

In many cases, the symptoms men are experiencing may have nothing to do with hormones. Often, lifestyle factors or psychological problems can be responsible for these symptoms.

For example, conditions such as erectile dysfunction, low libido, and mood swings may be the result of stress, anxiety and/or depression, particularly where men are struggling with midlife considerations including relationships, aging parents, and money issues. There may also be physical causes to these health challenges, such as heart problems, high blood pressure, diabetes, or the effects of smoking. The following lifestyle factors may also be contributing to how men feel as they age:

- Lack of sleep
- Poor diet
- Lack of exercise
- Drinking too much alcohol
- Low self-esteem

Reality

Where lifestyle or psychological problems are not responsible for the symptoms a man may be experiencing, the source may be low levels of testosterone, or hypogonadism where the testes produce few or no hormones.

Hypogonadism is sometimes present at birth. It can also develop later in life, particularly in men who are obese or have type 2 diabetes. This is known as late-onset hypogonadism and can cause the 'male menopause' symptoms.

Your family physician can diagnose late-onset hypogonadism based on the results of blood tests that measure your testosterone levels.

While as mentioned, a man's testosterone levels decline on average about 1% a year after age 40, most older men still have testosterone levels within the normal range, with only an estimated 10% to 25% having levels considered to be low.

Treatment

The most common type of treatment for symptoms of male menopause is making healthier lifestyle choices. For example, your doctor might advise you to:

- eat a healthy diet
- get regular exercise
- get enough sleep
- reduce your stress

These lifestyle habits can benefit all men. After adopting these habits, men who are experiencing symptoms of male menopause may see a dramatic change in their overall health.

If you're experiencing depression, your doctor may prescribe antidepressants, therapy, and lifestyle changes.

Where low testosterone is diagnosed, hormone replacement therapy may be a treatment option; however, it may come with risks and unwanted side effects. If you have prostate cancer, it may cause your cancer cells to grow. It could worsen sleep apnea or cause skin problems. Discussing all the positives and negatives with your physician, based on your health and family history, will be critical in your decision-making regarding hormone replacement therapy.

Sources:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/male-menopause/>

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/mens-health/in-depth/male-menopause/art-20048056>

<https://www.healthline.com/health/menopause/male>

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/sexual-health/in-depth/testosterone-therapy/art-20045728>

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Morandini', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Rochelle Morandini

Member Health & Well-Being, Director

If you would like to contribute or have ideas about what you would like to see in the ReFresh series, we would love to hear from you: contact rochelle@bcpvpa.bc.ca.