

Wellbeing and Fitness Support and Information

Men's Mental Health Month

Low Testosterone: What Every Bloke Should Know

You're Not Imagining It

Feeling a bit off lately? Maybe you're not as keen on things you used to enjoy, finding it harder to get motivated, or just don't feel like yourself anymore. If you're a man over 30, there's a good chance your testosterone levels might be playing a part in how you're feeling. Don't worry though - you're definitely not alone in this, and there's plenty that can be done to help.

What's All This About Testosterone Then?

Think of testosterone as your body's natural fuel for feeling like a man. It's the hormone that kicked in during puberty to give you a deeper voice, facial hair, and all those other changes. But its job doesn't stop there - throughout your adult life, testosterone keeps you feeling energetic, maintains your interest in sex, helps build muscle, and generally keeps you feeling on top of your game.

Your body produces most of this hormone in your testicles, with a little help from your adrenal glands. It's absolutely crucial for your physical and mental wellbeing, so when levels start dropping significantly, you really notice the difference.

What Counts as Normal?

Here in the UK, doctors typically look for testosterone levels between 12-30 nmol/L (that's how they measure it in your blood). The British Society for Sexual Medicine reckons anything below 8 nmol/L is definitely low, whilst 8-12 nmol/L sits in a bit of a grey area where you might still feel symptoms.

Making Cumbria a safer place for all



Here's something that might surprise you: research shows that about one in four British men have testosterone levels below 12 nmol/L. That's a lot more common than most people realise, so if you're wondering whether this might affect you, you're asking the right questions.

How Do You Know If Your Levels Are Low?

The signs of low testosterone can be pretty varied, and they often creep up gradually, which is why many men don't immediately connect the dots. The most obvious ones tend to be around sex - you might find you're just not as interested as you used to be, or perhaps having trouble with erections or those morning erections that used to be as reliable as your alarm clock. But it goes well beyond the bedroom. Many men describe feeling constantly knackered, even after a good night's sleep. You might find yourself feeling a bit down or irritable for no particular reason, struggling to concentrate at work, or just lacking that get-up-and-go attitude you once had.

Physically, you might notice you're putting on weight around your middle despite not changing your eating habits, or finding it harder to build or maintain muscle mass even when you're hitting the gym. Some men even experience hot flushes - yes, really - though that's not something many blokes like to talk about.

Why Does This Happen?

The natural ageing process is the biggest culprit here. From about age 30 onwards, your testosterone levels naturally drop by roughly 1% each year. It's just part of getting older, like needing reading glasses or finding hangovers last longer than they used to.

But some things can speed up this process or make it worse. Carrying extra weight, particularly around your belly, is a big factor. Diabetes, chronic stress, not getting enough sleep, drinking too much, and living a sedentary lifestyle can all knock your testosterone levels for six. Sometimes there are medical reasons too - problems with your testicles themselves, or with the parts of your brain that tell them what to do. Certain medications can also interfere with testosterone production.

You're Not the Only One

The good news is that awareness of low testosterone has really grown in recent years. NHS prescription data shows that testosterone treatments have nearly doubled over the past decade, jumping from about 158,000 to nearly 300,000 prescriptions annually. This isn't because the problem is getting worse necessarily - it's more likely that men are finally talking about it and doctors are taking it more seriously.

This increase reflects both better awareness among men like yourself and healthcare providers becoming more clued up about the condition. It's no longer something you have to suffer through in silence.

Getting Tested - What to Expect

If you think you might have low testosterone, the first step is chatting with your GP. They'll want to hear about your symptoms and might do a simple blood test. The key thing is that this test needs to be done in the morning (before 11am) and ideally when you haven't eaten breakfast yet, because testosterone levels are highest first thing in the morning.

If your levels come back low or borderline, your doctor will probably want to repeat the test to make sure it's accurate. They might also do some additional tests to see if there's an underlying cause that needs addressing.

Don't be embarrassed about discussing your symptoms - your GP has heard it all before, and they want to help you feel better. The more honest you are about what you're experiencing, the better they can help you.

What Can Be Done About It?

The medical treatment for low testosterone is called Testosterone Replacement Therapy, or TRT for short. When it's done properly under medical supervision, it can be genuinely life-changing for men who need it.

There are several ways to replace testosterone - gels you apply to your skin daily, injections every few weeks or months, patches, or even small pellets implanted under your skin. Your doctor will help you choose what works best for your lifestyle and preferences.

But here's the thing - medication isn't always the first answer, and it's definitely not the only answer. Many men see significant improvements just by making some lifestyle changes. Losing weight (particularly belly fat), getting regular exercise, ensuring you get quality sleep, managing stress better, and cutting back on alcohol can all naturally boost your testosterone levels.

The NHS Reality Check

Being honest here, getting testosterone treatment on the NHS can be a bit of a postcode lottery. The NHS tends to be quite conservative about prescribing testosterone, often setting the bar quite high before they'll consider treatment. Many men find that while they feel terrible and have clear symptoms, their testosterone levels might not be quite low enough to qualify for NHS treatment.

This has led to a growing number of private men's health clinics, like the Centre for Men's Health, offering more comprehensive assessment and treatment options. The downside is cost

– private treatment can run to several hundred pounds annually, which isn't pocket change for most people.

A Word of Caution

Before you start thinking about testosterone treatment, it's crucial to understand that this isn't something to mess about with on your own. You might see adverts for testosterone boosters or read about men ordering treatments online, but this can be genuinely dangerous.

Testosterone therapy does carry some risks - it can increase your chances of blood clots, make sleep apnoea worse, and in some cases might affect your heart. That's why proper medical supervision is absolutely essential. The British Society for Sexual Medicine has developed detailed guidelines specifically to make sure men get safe, appropriate treatment.

The Bottom Line

Low testosterone is a real medical condition that can seriously affect your quality of life, relationships, and general wellbeing. The symptoms aren't just "part of getting older" that you have to put up with - there are effective treatments available when they're genuinely needed. If you're experiencing symptoms that sound familiar, don't suffer in silence. Have a chat with your GP, be honest about what you're going through, and explore your options. Whether that's lifestyle changes, medical treatment, or a combination of both, there's a good chance you can start feeling more like yourself again.

Remember, looking after your health isn't unmanly - it's one of the most important things you can do for yourself and the people who care about you.

Getting Started

If you're ready to do something about how you're feeling, here's what you can do right now:

This week: Book an appointment with your GP. Don't put it off - you've already taken the first step by reading this far.

Be prepared: Write down your symptoms beforehand so you don't forget anything important when you're sitting in the surgery.

Ask questions: Don't be afraid to ask your doctor to explain things or to discuss all your treatment options.

Consider lifestyle changes: Even while you're waiting for your appointment, you could start making some positive changes to your diet, exercise routine, and sleep habits.

Your health matters, and you deserve to feel your best. Take that first step - you'll be glad you did.

Remember, this information is meant to help you understand low testosterone better, but it's no substitute for proper medical advice. Always consult with qualified healthcare professionals for personalised assessment and treatment recommendations.

Where to Find More Information

- Your local GP surgery
- British Society for Sexual Medicine
- NHS website (search for "male menopause")
- Men's Health Forum UK
- Centre for Men's Health
- British Journal of General Practice resources