

## Wellbeing and Fitness Support and Information

### Men's Mental Health Month

### Understanding Men's Menopause: Why men might feel so meh...h....

Men experiencing fatigue, mood changes, and reduced libido in their 40s and 50s may wonder if they're going through a "male menopause." While this term has gained popularity, UK health organizations provide important clarity on what's really happening and how to address these concerns.

### What Is Men's Menopause?

The term "male menopause" or "andropause" is somewhat misleading, according to the NHS. Unlike female menopause, which involves a sudden drop in hormones, men experience a gradual decline in testosterone levels – approximately 1% per year from around age 30-40. This natural decline typically doesn't cause significant problems on its own.

The British Association of Urological Surgeons (BAUS) prefers the more accurate term "Androgen Deficiency in the Ageing Male" (ADAM), which better describes the complex interplay of factors that can affect men's health as they age.

### Common Symptoms and Signs

Men experiencing age-related hormonal changes may notice a variety of symptoms that can significantly impact their quality of life. The NHS identifies several key indicators:

**Physical symptoms** include loss of muscle mass, reduced ability to exercise, fat redistribution (particularly developing a larger belly), difficulty sleeping, and general lack of energy. Many men also experience erectile dysfunction and reduced sex drive.

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## Emotional and mental symptoms

This encompasses mood swings, irritability, depression, poor concentration, short-term memory problems, and decreased enthusiasm for activities they once enjoyed.

BAUS provides a more comprehensive breakdown, categorizing symptoms into six main areas: circulatory and nervous system changes (hot flushes, sweating, insomnia), mood and mental function alterations, changes in physical vitality, diminished sexual function, physical appearance changes, and metabolic shifts including increased cholesterol and reduced bone density.

## Understanding the Causes

The reality is more complex than simply low testosterone. The NHS emphasizes that many symptoms attributed to "male menopause" actually stem from lifestyle or psychological factors rather than hormonal changes.

**Lifestyle factors** play a significant role. Poor diet, lack of exercise, excessive alcohol consumption, smoking, inadequate sleep, and high stress levels can all contribute to the symptoms men experience. Work pressures, relationship problems, financial concerns, or anxiety about aging parents can trigger what might appear to be hormonal symptoms.

**Late-onset hypogonadism** is a genuine medical condition where the testes produce insufficient hormones, but the NHS notes this is uncommon and not a normal part of aging. This condition is more likely to occur in men who are obese or have type 2 diabetes.

### When to Seek Help

If you're experiencing these symptoms, the NHS recommends consulting your GP. They will evaluate both your physical health and personal circumstances to determine the underlying cause.

Your doctor will likely conduct a comprehensive assessment including a detailed medical history, physical examination (including prostate check), and various blood tests. According to BAUS, these tests typically measure general health markers like kidney, liver, and thyroid function, as well as specific hormone levels including testosterone and sex hormone-binding globulin (SHBG).

For men under 50 experiencing these symptoms, BAUS recommends consultation with a hospital endocrinologist to rule out underlying hormone disorders.

## Treatment Options

Treatment approaches vary depending on the underlying cause of symptoms.

**Lifestyle modifications** are often the first recommendation. This includes stress management, maintaining a healthy diet, getting adequate sleep, regular exercise, limiting alcohol consumption, and smoking cessation. These changes alone can significantly improve many symptoms.

**Testosterone Replacement Therapy (TRT)** may be considered when blood tests confirm low testosterone levels and symptoms are significantly impacting quality of life. BAUS particularly recommends considering TRT for men with sexual dysfunction, type 2 diabetes, obesity (BMI over 30), or those taking certain medications that may affect hormone levels.

TRT can be administered through various methods including gels, patches, injections, or tablets. However, regular monitoring is essential, as the therapy can have side effects and is not suitable for all men.

**Additional medications** may be prescribed alongside or instead of TRT. For men with persistent erectile dysfunction, PDE-5 inhibitors like Viagra or Cialis may be recommended.

### Important Considerations and Risks

Both the NHS and BAUS emphasize that TRT is not appropriate for everyone. Men with certain conditions including breast cancer, advanced prostate cancer, severe heart failure, or untreated sleep apnea should not receive this treatment.

Regular monitoring during TRT is crucial, including prostate checks, blood tests to monitor testosterone levels, and assessment of cardiovascular health. While TRT doesn't cause prostate cancer, it can worsen existing prostate conditions.

The long-term benefits and risks of TRT are still being studied. Side effects can include headaches, weight gain, acne, hair loss, and changes in cholesterol and blood cell levels.

### The Bigger Picture

UK health experts emphasize that what's often labelled as "male menopause" is frequently a complex interplay of physical, psychological, and social factors rather than simply a hormone deficiency. The gradual nature of testosterone decline in men is very different from the dramatic hormonal changes women experience during menopause.

This doesn't diminish the very real impact these symptoms can have on men's lives. Depression, relationship problems, decreased work performance, and reduced quality of life are serious concerns that deserve proper medical attention and treatment.

## Moving Forward

If you're experiencing symptoms that concern you, don't dismiss them as simply "getting older." The NHS and other UK health organizations emphasize that effective treatments are available, whether the underlying cause is hormonal, psychological, or lifestyle-related.

Start by having an honest conversation with your GP about your symptoms and how they're affecting your life. Be prepared to discuss not just physical symptoms but also stress levels, relationships, work satisfaction, and overall mental health.

Remember that addressing these issues often requires a comprehensive approach. While hormone replacement might be appropriate for some men, others may benefit more from counselling, lifestyle changes, or treatment for underlying health conditions.

The key message from UK health experts is clear: these symptoms are treatable, but proper diagnosis is essential to ensure you receive the most appropriate and effective care for your individual situation.