

LOW TESTOSTERONE IN MEN

Testosterone is the primary male sex hormone (androgen). It is predominantly produced by the testicles. It is very important for maintaining muscle function, bone density and sexual function.

Symptoms

Symptoms of low testosterone include:

- Fatigue and depressed mood
- Low libido (sex drive)

If testosterone remains low over a prolonged period the following can develop:

- Bone loss, leading to osteoporosis
- Loss of muscle strength
- Loss of facial and body hair
- Breast growth (gynaecomastia)

Causes

- Normal ageing (causes small gradual decline)
- Previous injury or infection affecting the testicles
- Some cancer treatments – radiotherapy, chemotherapy, and some prostate cancer therapies
- Disorders that affect the pituitary gland, a gland at the base of the brain that controls all hormone-producing organs
- Other medical problems, such as liver and kidney disease, obesity, diabetes, high prolactin levels
- rare genetic problems

Treatment

Testosterone replacement therapy is available under PBS in Australia for

- men with established pituitary or testicular disorders
- men over 40 with low testosterone levels on at least 2 separate blood samples

Testosterone replacement can cause growth of prostate cancer, so this is excluded prior to commencing treatment. It can also cause growth of a normal prostate, causing some problems with urination. Symptoms of this are generally discussed prior to starting treatment and testosterone will not usually be started in patients with significant urinary symptoms.

Other side effects of treatment may include irritability or aggressive behaviour, acne, high amounts of red blood cells or body changes.