

Low Testosterone: Starting the Conversation

Testosterone is a hormone that is important for a man's health and well-being. The amount of testosterone each man has is different from what another man has, so what may be low for one man may be fine for another. If testosterone levels get too low, however, you are likely to have symptoms, including a decrease in your physical and sexual vigor.

What causes low testosterone?

Many factors can cause low testosterone:

- Alcohol abuse
- Chemotherapy
- Increased age
- Injury to the testicles
- Mumps
- Radiation treatment
- Steroid use
- Some genetic and medical disorders

Your chances of having low testosterone are higher if you have:

- Chronic lung problems
- Diabetes
- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol
- Obesity
- Osteoporosis

So far, we don't know for sure whether low testosterone is a result of or a cause of these conditions. But clearly, low testosterone may be a sign of a health problem.

We do know that men with low testosterone levels are 4 times more likely to get type 2 diabetes and have 38% higher risk of dying from heart-related problems.

Did you know? Men with diabetes who lose weight by improving their diets and exercise habits increase their testosterone levels, according to some studies.

What's normal for my age?

The amount of testosterone your body makes starts to go down when you're in your 20s but only by a small amount. After age 40, you make about 1% less per year than the year before.

Studies have found that 30% to 40% of men over age 45 and 50% of men in their 80s have low testosterone. Since testosterone levels may change during the day, your doctor will test your levels at least twice to confirm that they are low before talking with you about treatment.

Did you know? Less than 10% of men with low testosterone get treated for it.

How would I feel if my testosterone is low?

If you have low testosterone, you may feel tired and depressed, lose muscle size and strength, gain body fat, and have less interest in sex. You may also have trouble getting and maintaining an erection.

Did you know? You could have a low testosterone level without having any symptoms, or you could have symptoms associated with low testosterone yet have normal levels.

If you're concerned about low testosterone, talk with your doctor about it and the variety of treatments and lifestyle changes that can help.