Male Menopause: Myth or Reality

By Mayo Clinic Staff.

Sometimes called male menopause, aging-related hormone changes in men are very different from those in women. Hormone changes are a natural part of aging. Unlike the more dramatic hormone plunge that occurs in women during menopause, however, hormone changes in men occur gradually over a period of many years. Here’s what to expect, and what you can do about it.

Debunking the male menopause myth

The term “male menopause” is sometimes used to describe decreasing testosterone levels related to aging. Female menopause and so-called male menopause are two different situations, however. In women, ovulation ends and hormone production plummets during a relatively short period of time. In men, hormone production declines more gradually. The effects – such as changes in sexual function, energy level or mood - tend to be subtle and may go unnoticed for years.

So what’s the best way to refer to so-called male menopause? Many doctors use the term ‘andropause’ to describe aging related hormone changes in men. Other terms for so-called male menopause include testosterone deficiency, androgen deficiency of the aging male and late-onset hypogonadism.

Understanding male hormones over time

Testosterone levels vary greatly among men. In general, however, older men tend to have lower testosterone levels than do younger men. Testosterone levels gradually decline throughout adulthood – about 1 percent a year after age 30 on average. By about age 70, the decrease in a man’s testosterone level can be as much as 50 percent.

Still, it’s important to have a thorough medical evaluation before attributing low testosterone to normal aging. Left untreated, various medical conditions – such as obstructive sleep apnea – may decrease testosterone levels.

Recognising low testosterone levels

Some men have lower than normal testosterone levels without signs or symptoms. For others, low testosterone may cause:

- Changes in sexual function
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Physical changes
- Emotional changes

It is important to note that some of these signs and symptoms are a normal part of aging. Others can be caused by various underlying factors, including medication side effects, thyroid problems, depression and excessive alcohol. A blood test is the only way to diagnose a low testosterone level.

If you are interested in receiving more information about andropause, remember that your EAP is here to help. Contact us at eap@familiesinaction.net