

Men's health - Male menopause?

We all know that women go through a change of life, called menopause, but what about men? Does a male menopause, or "menoporsche", as it is sometimes called, actually exist?

Men can experience a gradual decrease in testosterone. Where females experience a dramatic drop in hormone levels over a relatively short period of time, hormone changes in men occur gradually, over a period of many years. Declining testosterone levels can lead to a variety of symptoms, e.g. weight gain, decrease in sex drive, erectile dysfunction, depression, loss of energy, hair loss, irritability and sleeping problems. Due to

the fact that this is such a gradual process, symptoms are often only noticed later on in life.

Normally at about 40 years of age, testosterone levels start to drop at a rate of about 1% a year. Generally, by the time a man turns 80, his testosterone level has been halved. Some men maintain normal testosterone levels throughout life, whilst others who have lower levels, don't necessarily experience any adverse symptoms.

Men who do suffer from symptoms related to low testosterone levels, should discuss having a blood test done with their doctor. Testosterone replacement therapy (TRT)

is an available option, although the treatment is surrounded with a certain amount of controversy. TRT may lead to an increased risk of prostate cancer and heart disease. While certain men who have symptoms related to abnormally low testosterone levels can benefit from treatment, it isn't appropriate treatment for most aging men.

It is however important to note that various other conditions can mimic symptoms similar to that of low testosterone levels, e.g. liver disease, thyroid disorders, kidney failure, depression, as well as certain lifestyle choices like alcohol abuse and use of illegal medications.

Grannies - Dry eyes

Although many people can have very good eyesight as they begin to age, the aging process can unfortunately contribute to various ocular problems, for example dry eyes.

Dry eyes occur when tear glands (lacrima glands) don't produce enough tears, or when tears of poor quality are produced. Tears serve as a protective coating for the eyes, providing essential nutrients, washing away dust, and keeping the eyes moist. If normal quantities and quality of tears are not produced, various symptoms can occur, like itching, stinging, pain, redness, light sensitivity and blurry vision. As a person begins to age, tear production decreases, making dry eyes a common complaint in older people. Women suffer more commonly from dry eyes as hormonal changes e.g. menopause, can also decrease tear production. Ironically, dry eyes often lead to more watery eyes, as the body senses that too few tears are being produced, triggering excessive tearing.

These tears however do not contain enough lubrication to relieve symptoms of dry eyes sufficiently.

Various external factors can also contribute to the aggravation of dry eyes, for example environmental factors like wind, heat, cigarette smoke, dust and air conditioning. These factors should be avoided as far as possible.

Certain medications can also cause dry eyes, thus looking into the medication use and history of a patient might be helpful. Antihistamines, antidepressants and other anti-cholinergic drugs can contribute to the problem.

What advice and treatment can be offered to patients suffering from this condition?

- Encourage regular visits to an optometrist to ensure early detection of any ocular diseases
- Be screened regularly for diseases like diabetes that could cause eye problems

if untreated

- Take a supplement containing vitamin A as well as lutein
- Use a humidifier if possible to help moisten air
- Rest eyes often and blink eyes regularly
- Wear sunglasses when outdoors to protect eyes from wind, dust and harmful ultraviolet rays
- Use artificial tears regularly, like Refresh, Teargel or Cellufresh during the day and a thicker preparation such as Celluvisc at night before going to sleep.

Serious vision complications can occur if dry eyes are not adequately treated. Untreated dry eyes could lead to desiccation of the corneal epithelium, ulceration and perforation of the cornea, increased eye infections and visual disturbances. Encourage patients to seek help early and prevent these severe complications!

References available upon request.

