



The Liker Health Report

Keeping People Focused on Staying Fit & Healthy

Fall 2011

The Liker Health Report is a quarterly publication intended to raise awareness of health-related issues and to encourage readers to take charge of their health and live healthier, more fulfilling lives.

The Heart of the Matter: LOW TESTOSTERONE

The latest medical condition and accompanying drug cure to be touted in television and internet ads is “Low T” (short for low testosterone) in men over forty-five. But just how common is low testosterone and is medication the appropriate treatment for one’s lack of energy and loss of “zest” for life? So, before you run to your doctor, consider setting aside the sensationalism and get the common sense facts first, and then if concerns persist, consider an evaluation with an endocrinologist.

Testosterone is the most important male sex hormone and has the role of influencing typical male characteristics - facial, pubic, and body hair; muscle mass; and bone. It also helps maintain sex drive and sperm production. Testosterone is produced by the testes and the quantity is controlled by the brain and pituitary gland. A short-term decrease in testosterone (called *hypogonadism*) can cause a man’s sex drive to decrease, less rigid erections, low sperm count, and enlarged breasts. Low testosterone levels over a long period of time may cause a loss of body hair; loss of muscle mass and strength; weakening of the bones; accumulation of body fat; loss of energy; mood swings; and smaller testes. Symptoms vary from person to person and not all symptoms must be present for a diagnosis of low testosterone.

It is normal for a man’s testosterone level to decrease slightly after age forty, but only a small number of men have “below normal” levels for their age. A drop of about one percent annually is what is considered part of normal aging, yet a myth persists that men must preserve the hormone levels of their youth. A recent Australian study of men aged 40 to 97 has provided some interesting findings. Some of the older men did experience a modest drop in testosterone which resulted in non-specific symptoms of fatigue and low sex drive, yet researchers attributed this to acute and chronic conditions associated with aging, such as heart disease, obesity, and type 2 diabetes, all of which are unrelated to testosterone levels.

For a small minority of men who truly have low testosterone levels, hormone replacement therapy is recommended to counteract the undesirable symptoms. However, treatment is not without its own health risks. Testosterone administered in either gel form or a patch can contribute to the growth of prostate tumors. Men who have a family history of prostate cancer need careful monitoring, and any man with active prostate cancer or breast cancer should not take supplemental testosterone.

Causes of Low Testosterone

Testicular Injury

trauma, radiation, chemotherapy, castration

Infection

Hormonal Disorders

pituitary disease, tumors, high prolactin levels

Systemic Diseases

HIV/AIDS, chronic liver disease, chronic kidney disease

Genetic Conditions

Klinefelter syndrome, Kallmann syndrome, Prader-Willi syndrome, hemochromatosis, myotonic dystrophy

Some Medications

Unknown Causes

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Your Lifestyle: PERIODONTITIS (GUM DISEASE)

Periodontitis (generally referred to as gum disease) is a chronic inflammatory disease which damages the tissue and bone that holds the teeth in place. Left untreated, gum disease is a major cause of tooth loss in adults; one or multiple teeth can be involved. Researchers have suggested that periodontitis is associated with other inflammation-linked diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, and rheumatoid arthritis. Because overall health and oral health are connected, we cannot be remiss in taking care of our teeth and gums.

The primary cause of gum disease is the sticky, colorless plaque which forms on the teeth between cleanings. The mouth is full of bacteria which along with mucus form the plaque. Brushing and flossing help dislodge the plaque but any that is not removed hardens and forms tartar. Tartar can only be removed by professional cleaning at a dentist's office.

If plaque and tartar remain on the teeth for long periods of time, the bacteria cause gingivitis, or inflammation of the gums. Symptoms include red, swollen gums that are prone to bleeding. Gingivitis is relatively mild and can be reversed with twice daily brushing, daily flossing, and regular professional teeth cleaning. The tissue that holds the teeth in place retains its ability to keep the teeth anchored in place.

Untreated gingivitis can progress to periodontitis ("inflammation around the tooth"). The gums retract from the teeth and form spaces called pockets. Bacteria invade these pockets, and the immune system fights the bacteria as the plaque spreads further. Toxins from the bacteria combined with the body's normal response to infection start to dissolve the bone and connective tissue that hold teeth in place. If periodontitis is not treated, teeth may eventually become loose and require extraction, or they may simply fall out spontaneously.

Poor oral hygiene is not the only cause of gum disease; there are several other factors which affect the overall health of the gums.

▶▶ **Smoking** is the number one risk factor for developing periodontitis. Smoking can also decrease the chances that treatment will be successful because chemicals



in tobacco slow down the body's own healing process.

▶▶ For about thirty percent of the population, **genetics** play a role in gum disease susceptibility. Even with the recommended oral hygiene habits, this group of people may be six times more likely to develop periodontitis.

▶▶ **Hormonal fluctuations**

in girls and women during puberty, pregnancy, and menopause can make the gums more sensitive, thereby making it easier for gingivitis to develop.

▶▶ People with **diabetes** have a higher risk of developing infections, including gum disease. Elevated blood sugar levels create the ideal environment for bacteria to thrive.

▶▶ **Medications** which reduce the amount of saliva produced increase the gums' vulnerability to infection. Common culprits include oral contraceptives, anti-depressants, and some heart medications.

▶▶ **Diseases** such as cancer or AIDS and the treatments can negatively impact the gums.

▶▶ **Teeth grinding** puts excess force on the jaw and gums and may increase the rate of periodontal damage.

Symptoms of Gum Disease

- ✓ Bleeding gums while brushing, flossing, or eating
- ✓ Receding gums (makes the teeth look longer)
- ✓ Red, swollen or tender gums
- ✓ Loose teeth
- ✓ Teeth that have fallen out
- ✓ Tooth sensitivity
- ✓ Difficult or painful chewing
- ✓ Mouth sores
- ✓ Pus between teeth and gums
- ✓ Change in how teeth fit together when chewing food
- ✓ Change in how dentures fit
- ✓ Persistent bad breath



Did You Know?

Gum disease doesn't typically occur until the third or fourth decade of life and is more common in men.

Playing It Safe: INFLUENZA

Flu season is just around the corner and viruses that cause the flu will begin circulating soon. However, viruses and bacteria (which cause colds) are present 365 days of the year. The human body is continually defending us against these invaders which can otherwise cause symptoms ranging from mild sniffles to severe respiratory disorders or gastrointestinal conditions. Three factors which increase your exposure to bacteria and viruses are lifestyle behaviors, poor hand washing, and poor air quality. They cause a decrease in the body's natural ability to fight off bacteria and viruses.

- ✓ Reduced immunity results from poor diet (including lack of vitamins & minerals), smoking, alcohol or drug use, stress, lack of physical activity, and inadequate, quality sleep.
- ✓ Insufficient or lack of hand washing; touching items that a sick person touched, then touching one's eyes, nose, mouth; shaking hands or kissing someone who is sick; and eating food prepared by someone who is sick spread germs easily.
- ✓ Unventilated homes and buildings which recycle air without filtering out bacteria and viruses provide the ideal environment for germs.

Protecting Yourself Against the Flu

The best insurance against contracting the flu is to get an annual flu shot. Although it is not 100% effective, most people will be protected and anyone who does become infected should have a less severe case. Every year, the flu shot protects against three viruses that have been identified by research and worldwide virus surveillance. The 2011-12 vaccine (Northern Hemisphere formula) protects against two influenza A strains and one B strain. The vaccine is recommended for everyone six months and older. People who have an increased risk of serious, even life-threatening, flu complications are strongly advised to get a flu shot.

High risk people include young children, pregnant women, people with chronic health conditions such as asthma, diabetes, or heart and lung disease, and people over age sixty-five. Health care workers who spend time around high risk individuals also need to be vaccinated to prevent spreading the flu to their patients. Parents and child care providers of children younger than six months need to be vaccinated because infants under six months are too young to be vaccinated. The more people who are vaccinated the less prevalence of flu, even in people who forgo vaccination.

2011-2012 Seasonal Influenza Vaccine Formula

- ✓ A/California/7/2009 (H1N1)-like virus
- ✓ A/Perth/16/2009 (H3N2)-like virus
- ✓ B/Brisbane/60/2008-like virus

The 2011-2012 formula is the same as the 2010-11 formula, but this doesn't mean that you should skip the shot this year. Immunity declines over time, so last year's shot won't be sufficient to protect you for another year. In the future, we're likely to see a vaccine with a second B strain included. Clinical trials are currently underway for this quadrivalent vaccine.



Staying Healthy When Everyone Else is Sick

- ✓ Wash your hands frequently with soap and warm water, particularly after being around someone who is sick.
- ✓ Wash your hands before eating or preparing food.
- ✓ Avoid touching your mouth, eyes, nose.
- ✓ Replace your toothbrush after you have been sick.
- ✓ Change your bed linens and bath towels frequently.
- ✓ Clean the telephone receiver and cell phone daily (pathogens like to hide and it's easy to re-infect yourself).
- ✓ Change the air filters in your home as often as recommended by the manufacturer; consider using HEPA filters.
- ✓ Air out your home regularly, especially when someone is sick.
- ✓ Avoid dairy products which thicken phlegm and make it more difficult to expel the bacteria and viruses.
- ✓ Drink plenty of clear fluids to stay hydrated.
- ✓ Avoid ice and cold.

Charting the Symptoms: URINARY PROBLEMS

Women and men commonly experience difficulty, pain or changes in urination habits, but some symptoms can signal a more serious problem. Begin with Question #1 and follow through to your specific symptom(s).

QUESTION #1

Do you have pain or burning with urination? || **NO** → Go to QUESTION #7.

YES

QUESTION #2

Is your urine cloudy? || **NO** → Go to QUESTION #5.

YES

QUESTION #3

Do you have a fever and/or a backache? || **YES** → Pain and fever may be caused by a **kidney infection**.

|| **ASAP** →



NO

QUESTION #4

Do you have an intense, sharp pain in your back or in your groin? || **NO** → May be a **bladder infection** or a more serious kidney problem.

|| **ASAP** →



|| **YES** → May be a **kidney stone** or something more serious; go to an emergency room.

|| **ASAP** →

|| **ASAP** →



QUESTION #5

Are you a man and does it ache under your scrotum? || **YES** → You may have **prostatitis**, an infection of the prostate.

|| →



NO

QUESTION #6

Are you a man and do you have any discharge from the tip of your penis? || **YES** → You may have an infection such as **urethritis** or a **sexually transmitted disease**.

|| **ASAP** →



|| **NO** → Go to QUESTION #7.

QUESTION #7

Do you have the urge to urinate frequently and only produce small amounts of urine?

|| YES

You may have **cystitis** (bladder infection), **interstitial cystitis** (bladder irritation), a **kidney stone** or a chemical in the urine.



NO

QUESTION #8

Are you producing more urine than usual?

|| NO

Go to QUESTION #10.

YES

QUESTION #9

Are you overly thirsty, drinking lots of fluids, losing weight unintentionally, or have family members with diabetes?

|| YES

You may have **diabetes**.

|| NO

Caffeinated beverages and some medications can increase urine production.



Reduce caffeine consumption.

QUESTION #10

Are you a woman and do you leak urine when you, cough, sneeze or laugh?

|| YES

You may have **stress incontinence** from weak bladder muscles caused by aging or childbearing.

Try Kegel exercises; wear feminine protection; consult physician if necessary.

NO

QUESTION #11

Are you a man and do you dribble urine after urinating; have difficulty starting the urine stream; or frequently wake up at night to urinate?

|| YES

You may have an **enlarged prostate**, a prostate **infection** or prostate **cancer**.



NO

QUESTION #12

Do you have blood in the urine?

|| YES

You may have a **kidney stone**, a kidney or bladder **tumor**, **bladder infection**, **kidney trauma**, or a **bleeding disorder**.

|| ASAP



NO

Check with your doctor. If you think the problem might be serious, call right away.

Charting the Symptoms is an educational tool to help readers understand what certain symptoms might mean, what the diagnosis might be, and when a physician should be consulted. It should not replace medical advice, nor should you rely upon it solely to make health decisions. Charting the Symptoms has been adapted from the American Academy of Family Physician's *Family Health & Medical Guide*.

Personal Health: HEART DISEASE & ERECTILE DYSFUNCTION

Erectile dysfunction (ED) can be a wake-up call for men who are at risk of heart disease. The same factors that contribute to heart disease (atherosclerosis) can cause ED. Recent research has shown that ED may be one of the first signs, even when no other outwardly apparent signs of heart disease are present. ED without any other risk factors was a strong predictor of heart disease. These traditional heart disease risk factors are also risk factors for erectile dysfunction.

Atherosclerosis, also called hardening of the arteries, results from a plaque build-up in the arteries; it doesn't only occur in the heart arteries but also in other parts of the body. The plaque causes the arteries to narrow and become hard which restricts blood flow. The arteries supplying blood to the penis are smaller than the arteries supplying blood to the heart. This is why symptoms of atherosclerosis are more likely to first show up as erectile dysfunction. Atherosclerosis in the arteries that supply blood to the heart is termed coronary artery disease or heart disease.

Perhaps a more significant finding is that a man's age when he first has ED symptoms is an important consideration. Younger men with ED have a higher risk of heart disease. If the age of ED onset is age sixty or younger there is a strong probability that he will have a cardiovascular event (heart attack, stroke) within the next five years. For men under fifty with ED, the risk is even greater. However, if ED does not present until age seventy, the risk of heart disease is relatively low. Thus, men under sixty (and especially under fifty) with symptoms of erectile dysfunction should discuss it with their doctor. Getting treatment before heart problems become serious can increase quality of life and reduce the chances of premature death. Likewise, treatment for heart disease may help improve ED.

If you have ED and any of the following risk factors, the likelihood of having atherosclerosis and heart disease is increased:

- ✓ Diabetes
- ✓ Age (under 50 = higher risk; over 70 = lower risk)
- ✓ Being overweight or obese
- ✓ High LDL ("bad") cholesterol
- ✓ Smoking cigarettes
- ✓ High blood pressure
- ✓ Parent or sibling with heart disease
- ✓ Depression

Erectile dysfunction is defined as difficulty maintaining an erection sufficient for sexual intercourse.

Men who desire to remain sexually active as they get older should also live a healthy lifestyles. Behaviors such as eating healthy, exercising regularly and not smoking, will help prevent both ED and heart disease.

Various medications and recreational drugs can also affect sexual arousal and sexual performance. Since men are affected differently by medications, it's important to pay attention to your specific symptoms. If you suspect that a medication is causing ED, read the package insert and discuss it with your primary care physician. You may be able to switch to another medication without the negative effects. Do not abruptly stop taking any medication as it could potentially produce life-threatening complications.

Common Medications & Drugs That May Cause Erectile Dysfunction

- ✓ Antidepressants
- ✓ Antihistamines
- ✓ High blood pressure medications
- ✓ Diuretics
- ✓ Parkinson's disease medications
- ✓ Chemotherapy drugs
- ✓ H2 Blockers (for acid reflux, heartburn)
- ✓ Synthetic antiandrogen (for male baldness, prostate conditions)
- ✓ Estrogen
- ✓ Lipid lowering medications
- ✓ Opiate analgesics (painkillers)
- ✓ Recreational drugs (alcohol, nicotine, marijuana, amphetamines, barbiturates, cocaine, heroin)



Did You Know?

Male sexual dysfunction is **not** a natural part of aging.

LOW TESTOSTERONE

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Low testosterone is diagnosed by physical exam and blood tests. A physician will check the size and consistency of the testes and scrotum, penis size, breast size, amount of body hair, and any loss of peripheral vision (a sign of a pituitary tumor). Blood tests performed in the early morning hours (7 to 10am) measure testosterone. The normal range is between 300 and 1,000 ng/dL. Any measurements out of this range should be confirmed with a second blood test before treatment is prescribed. Other pituitary hormones are also measured if a man has low testosterone.

POSSIBLE RISKS OF TESTOSTERONE REPLACEMENT

- ✓ Elevated red blood cell count
- ✓ Acne
- ✓ Breast enlargement
- ✓ Prostate enlargement
- ✓ Prostate cancer growth
- ✓ Sleep apnea (rare)
- ✓ Fluid retention in the legs, ankles, and feet (rare)



For the majority of men, “Low-T” is NOT the cause of their fatigue or reduced sex drive. The natural testosterone levels will provide most men a lifetime of vitality and virility. However, if you or a loved one has symptoms which affect your relationship or quality of life, make an appointment with an endocrinologist. Some symptoms could also be a sign of depression, low blood pressure, obesity, diabetes, or cardiovascular disease, so it’s important to get the appropriate treatment.



Did You Know?

Anabolic steroids can suppress normal testosterone production which can lead to shrunken testicles and decreased sperm count.



The Medicine Cabinet

Mucinex®

Trade Name: Guaifenesin (gwye fen’ e sin)

Drug Classification: non-prescription expectorant

Purpose: relieves chest congestion.

Action: thins the mucus in the airways which makes it easier to cough up; guaifenesin does not treat the cause of the symptoms nor does it speed recovery.

Dispensing Method: tablet, capsule, dissolving granules, or syrup taken by mouth with or without food every four hours; extended-release tablets are taken every twelve hours; Mucinex® products are available in adult and child versions.

Major Precautions: Parent giving Mucinex® or a combination cough/cold product that contains guaifenesin to a child, read the package label carefully to be sure that it is the appropriate product for a child of a specific age. Do not give an adult version to a child. Overdose can be a problem if multiple products are given - check with the child’s pediatrician first. Dissolving granules and syrups contain artificial sweeteners which may cause allergies in some people.

Side Effects: The most common side effects include headache, nausea, and vomiting. **SERIOUS:** Call your doctor immediately if symptoms do not improve within seven days or if you also have a high fever or headache that does not go away.

As with any medication, always follow your doctor’s instructions, and if you have any problems, side effects, or questions, follow up with your doctor or pharmacist.

Which Product Does What?

Nasal decongestant -- unclogs a stuffy nose

Cough suppressant -- quiets a cough

Expectorant -- loosens mucus so it can be coughed up more easily

Antihistamine -- stops a runny nose, sneezing, and/or watery, itchy eyes

What's the Message?

FOR YOUR **LOW TESTOSTERONE** AWARENESS:

A slight decrease in testosterone levels after age forty is normal.

Fatigue and decreased energy can be a symptom of numerous conditions and should not be presumed to be "Low-T".

FOR YOUR **GUM DISEASE** AWARENESS:

Preventing gum disease entails brushing teeth twice a day, flossing once a day, getting regular professional cleanings, and not smoking.

Recovery from periodontitis can be slower and more difficult if you have other diseases or you smoke.

FOR YOUR **INFLUENZA** AWARENESS:

Frequent hand washing is your best defense against cold and flu germs when those around you are ill.

It is important to get a flu shot every year to minimize your risk of infection.

FOR YOUR **URINARY SYMPTOMS** AWARENESS:

Some urinary symptoms can signal a serious problem and should be evaluated by a doctor.

Sharp, knife-like pain in the back or groin is a medical emergency.

FOR YOUR **HEART DISEASE & ED** AWARENESS:

If you have symptoms of erectile dysfunction, check with your doctor as it could be an early warning sign of heart disease.

Maintaining a healthy lifestyle will minimize the risk of atherosclerosis in blood vessels supplying the heart, penis, and other organs with blood.

QUOTABLE QUOTATIONS

To insure good health: eat lightly, breathe deeply, live moderately, cultivate cheerfulness, and maintain an interest in life.

William Londen

Dear Dr. Liker... I recently had MRSA and my doctor believes I contracted it during a pedicure. How do I protect myself in the future?

Manicures and pedicures can be a common source of MRSA (Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus) infections as well as other staph and fungal infections if proper sanitation is overlooked. Antibiotic-resistant bacteria and fungi can easily spread from one salon patron to another if nail instruments are not properly cleaned between uses. A damaged cuticle is the opening the bacteria or fungus needs to get into your body. Pushing back the cuticle, or buffing/filing the nail too aggressively at the base of the cuticle, or cutting the cuticle can expose you to infection.

You don't need to give up going to the nail salon, but consider these tips: (1) ask your nail technician how he/she cleans the instruments; (2) avoid salons that don't sanitize their instruments and/or don't have a hygienic environment; (3) purchase your own nail instruments and bring these to the salon. Your risk of infection may not be eliminated, but can be reduced significantly. Most importantly, don't be afraid or embarrassed to protect your own health.

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LIKER CONSULTING, INC.

The Center for Executive & Corporate Health

Harley R. Liker, M.D., M.B.A.
CEO

9675 Brighton Way, Suite 350
Beverly Hills, CA 90210

E-mail: hliker@likerconsulting.com
www.likerhealthreport.com

Publisher and Editor-in-Chief -- Harley Liker, M.D., M.B.A.
Senior Editor -- Karen Edwards, M.S.

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