

# Let's talk testosterone. Are your testosterone levels driving you nuts?

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Testosterone is a hormone produced by men and women but is often called the 'male sex hormone'. Testosterone is produced in men's testicles and controls their development. During puberty, testosterone helps boys develop male physical features like body and facial hair, deeper voices, and muscle strength. It also drives sperm production, the prostate gland, and the male sex drive. Testosterone levels rise during puberty, peak during the late teen years, and then level off. After age 30, it is normal for a man's testosterone levels to decrease slightly every year.



## Causes of low testosterone (low-T)

Most men have more than enough testosterone. But, the body can produce too little testosterone. Hypogonadism, or low-T, is defined as low levels of testosterone in the setting of a cluster of symptoms. There are a lot of different potential causes for low testosterone:

- Ageing
- Alcohol abuse
- Obesity
- Some medications
- Obstructive sleep apnoea
- Poor sleep or shift work
- Trauma or injuries to the testicles

Some studies have suggested that a high intake of bread, pastries, dairy products, desserts, and processed foods and a low intake of homemade foods (good sources of vegetables or healthy sources of cholesterol and Omega-3) can be associated with lower levels of testosterone production.

## Symptoms

Common low-T symptoms are decreased energy and mood, problems having erections, low sex drive, reduced concentration, and increased body fat. Other health issues can cause these symptoms, so discussing them with your doctor is essential.

## Diagnosis

The best way to test for low testosterone is through a doctor who will do a medical history, physical examination, and blood work to test total testosterone levels.

## Ways to improve and maintain healthy levels of testosterone

There are lifestyle changes you can make to enhance testosterone production.

- **Get active:** Exercise can help prevent low testosterone by helping to maintain and optimise the natural production of testosterone. Resistance exercises or combinations with some aerobic exercise can be helpful, as well as maintaining lean body mass. Low levels of fat and high levels of muscles can also encourage the maintenance of higher natural testosterone levels. However, extremely high volumes of aerobic exercise can lead to lower testosterone levels.
- **Maintain a healthy body weight:** Research shows that obese men have testosterone levels about 30 percent lower than healthy men.
- **Eat healthier:** Healthy eating is vital in maintaining healthy body weight. A healthy diet includes a good balance of carbohydrates, proteins, healthy fat sources such as Omega-3s, and healthy sources of cholesterol. Research has shown that no specific diet can increase testosterone production, but maintaining a healthy body weight—which includes healthy eating—is essential for producing testosterone.
- **Drink less alcohol:** Drinking excessive alcohol has been associated with lower testosterone production. Drinking smaller amounts or no alcohol than excessive drinking habits will help maintain normal testosterone levels.
- **Get enough sleep:** Good sleep hygiene can help prevent low testosterone. Getting regular and healthy sleep has been associated with better testosterone production, while shift work and disrupted sleep have been linked to lower levels. Aim for at least seven hours for long-term health (and testosterone) benefits.

## Treatment

If you have low testosterone, a healthy lifestyle that includes regular exercise, good sleep, and a healthy diet is recommended to promote the natural optimisation of testosterone production and to maintain healthy body weight. If testosterone levels are still low even with healthy lifestyle changes, and you have symptoms, testosterone replacement therapy (TRT) can be considered. Men who still want children should not take TRT because it will likely stop sperm production. Talk with your doctor about whether you need testosterone therapy.

Suppose you or someone you care about is suffering because of low testosterone. In that case, the best thing to do is connect with your doctor and discuss navigating your symptoms and checking and managing low testosterone appropriately.

### *References and sources consulted:*

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