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“Midlife Crisis” or Male Menopause?

In my practice I see a significant number of men that have reached “middle age”. Many of these men come to me with symptoms that are somewhat vague, which many times they attribute to stress, overwork, or situational events. Irritability, fatigue, depression, reduced libido, erectile dysfunction, are all typical complaints. These sometimes are attributed to a “midlife crisis”.

Men who believe they are going through the proverbial midlife crisis may actually be experiencing a form of male menopause called “andropause”. It’s like puberty in reverse. Like puberty, the changes that take place in aging men are hormonal, psychological, interpersonal, social, sexual, and spiritual. Andropause is characterized by a loss in testosterone, the male hormone. Testosterone levels drop in all men as they age, however, some men are impacted more than others. Estimates are that as many as 25 million American males between the ages of 40-55 are experiencing some degree of male menopause today.

Male menopause can be insidious. The loss of testosterone is gradual with levels dropping 1-1.5% annually. Only recently has the medical community taken notice of this condition. Often men are treated for a specific medical condition. For example, an adropausal male may be diagnosed with depression and prescribed an antidepressant. Both doctor and patient think his problem has been addressed. However if that man has other symptoms of male menopause such as decreased libido, the antidepressant may actually exaggerate that problem.

Testosterone replacement therapy is the primary way of treating men with declining levels of testosterone. However, this form of treatment is still a controversial area. Instances where testosterone replacement is advised include men with clear bone density loss, which leads to osteoporosis, and in treating sexual dysfunction in cases where Viagra or other prescribed remedies don't work. Testosterone replacement therapy is not always a benign therapy. Men considering therapy should have their PSA levels checked, as testosterone therapy will accelerate the growth of prostate cancer. Other risks include stroke, breast development, and ironically shutting down sperm production.

Testosterone replacement can be administered by a physician as an injection, or prescribed in patch or gel form to apply to the skin. For some men it can improve their sense of well-being and restore lost energy levels.

Male menopause is not the only explanation for distressing symptoms that men may experience as they age, but can in some instances be responsible for a decline in energy, sense of well-being, loss of muscle-mass, and other physical and psychological problems. If you are concerned, please discuss these symptoms with your physician. A blood test may reveal a potential problem for which treatment is available.

For more information, please visit <http://www.safecare.com>.

Richard J. Wilbur, M.D. is Board Certified in Internal Medicine.

Office Hours:

Mondays 9:00 AM - 4:30 PM,

Tuesdays 9:00 AM - 4:30 PM

Wednesdays 9:00 AM - 7:30 PM

Thursdays 9:00 AM - 12:15 PM

Fridays 9:00 AM - 4:30 PM

Alternate Saturdays 9:00 AM - 1:00 PM

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