Male Menopause Fact or Fiction?

Are you over 40 and feeling fat, tired, irritable, depressed and undervalued? Is it a midlife crisis or could you be suffering from the male menopause?

Sometimes known as the male climacteric (Greek klima - time; terixein - to fall), there is a lot of discussion as to whether or not the male menopause exists in any real medical sense. We know for sure that women go through very definite physical changes in their mid-life. Ovulation stops, hormone levels drop quickly. Within a few short years they become unable to have children any more. Of course these features don’t apply to men.

In contrast to women, male hormone levels remain pretty constant and most men can father children into their seventies. There is a gradual decline in hormone levels and, by the age of 80 years, serum testosterone concentrations fall to about 75% and free testosterone to about 50% of what they were at age 20. So where does the idea of men suffering a menopause come from?

Disease, Hormone Levels and HRT

Testosterone levels gradually reduce over time and that process may be naturally protective to the male body. For some men more dramatic hormonal changes signal the presence of diseases such as hypogonadism. If testosterone is linked with decrees in sexual activity, declining muscle bulk, and reduction in minerals in bones, then in theory improvements should be made with hormone replacement therapy (HRT).

This is not often the case however and there are significant risks in HRT such as non-cancerous growth of the prostate and excessive blood production. HRT in men has also been linked to prostate cancer and can exacerbate sleep apnea.

Medical opinion is divided. Treatment for men might be offered following investigation of symptoms and the doctor consulted.

Male Menopause as a Psychological Event

The term male menopause has come about because so many men experience mid-life dissatisfaction and difficulties. For some men these issues become all consuming, hence the term midlife crisis.

Menopause is a word some people are using to express, amongst other things, unfulfilled desires and expectations, work dissatisfaction, the loss of passion in personal relationships and the loss of a positive body image as the ravages of time and abuse become glaringly obvious. The signs and symptoms signify menopause either as a disease or as a state of being.

• Depression, nervousness, Decreased libido
• Erectile dysfunction
• Decreased bone and muscle mass
• Flashes and sweats
• Tiredness and fatigue
• Poor concentration
• Increased body mass, fat

Men, like women, have to face change as they age and this is harder for some than others. Symptoms of possible disease do have to be investigated but be aware that the medicalization of life is leading to us becoming a society of ‘pill poppers’. Feel down, take a pill, unable to get a long and sustained erection, take a pill, feeling tired, take a pill. But at the end of the day a pill is just a pill and it won’t solve anything. Mid life is certainly a time for reflection, but be careful not to throw away the good things in your search for novelty, change, or the quest for youth.

Antioxidants improve male fertility

Taking supplements could increase chance of partner pregnancy

Men who take antioxidants may improve their fertility, according to recent research.

Antioxidants include natural and synthetic chemicals which help to reduce the damage caused by chemicals called reactive oxygen species. The latter are said to cause damage to sperm cells, which may result in lowered sperm counts and interfere with their ability to fertilise eggs.

The review looked at 54 trials involving 2,876 couples undergoing in vitro fertilisation and sperm injections. Most men in the trials had low sperm counts or low sperm motility. The trials explored the use of many different types of oral antioxidants, including vitamin E, L-carnitine, zinc and magnesium.

Compared to controls, a couple was more likely to have a pregnancy or live birth if the man took antioxidants.

Lead researcher Marian Shovell, from the University of Auckland, said: “When trying to conceive as part of an assisted reproductive program, it may be advisable to encourage men to take oral antioxidant supplements to improve their partners’ chances of becoming pregnant.”

However, these conclusions are currently based on limited evidence.”

There were not enough data comparing different antioxidants to reach any conclusions about the relative effectiveness of supplements.

“We need more head to comparisons to understand whether any one antioxidant is performing better than any other,” Ms Shovell said. 2

The best way to retain newly learned information is to take a nap, according to the latest research. Experiments showed that the brain is better at resisting attempts at removing a recent memory during sleep, as opposed to when a person is awake.

Earlier research had shown that new memories stored in the hippocampus are fragile, and apt to be lost to new information when the person is awake.

Researchers had assumed that this would also be the case when a person was asleep, but were surprised to discover that in fact the brain was better at retaining newly learned information.

Twenty-four volunteers were asked to memorise 15 pairs of words while being exposed to an unpleasant smell. A short while later, half of the subjects who stayed awake were asked to learn a slightly different card pattern while being exposed to the same smell.

The other twelve subjects performed the second exercise after a brief nap, but were also exposed to the same smell.

Both groups were then tested on the original card pattern, with the second group performing significantly better than the first - retaining 85 per cent of the pattern against 60 per cent of those who stayed awake.

The researchers assume that the reason the brain is better at retaining new information during sleep is that in the first few minutes of sleep, the information is passed from the hippocampus, where it is initially stored, to the neocortex, the site of longer term memory.

In fact, after a 40 minute nap, most of the new information was stored in the neocortex, where it could no longer be overwritten by new information stored in the hippocampus.

The researchers, from the University of Lubeck in Germany, where the experiments were conducted, said the discovery could pave the way for new approaches to learning memory intensive information, such as languages.