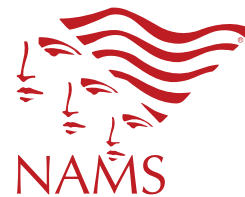


# WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT Testosterone for Midlife Women With Sexual Problems

**S**ome postmenopausal women are disturbed because they no longer enjoy sexual intimacy. They don't feel the desire to initiate sex or respond to a lover's advances. Some women have heard that testosterone may help sexual drive—but how do they find out more about available options, including safety and effectiveness?

## Menopause

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### Women have testosterone too?

In addition to estrogen, levels of other hormones produced by the ovaries—progesterone (another female hormone) and testosterone (a male androgen hormone produced at lower levels in women)—are also changing during your midlife years. Although androgens are the hormones that promote male sexual characteristics, they play an important role in women's sexual response.

### How does testosterone affect female sexual desire?

Intermittent decreases in progesterone affect menstrual periods more than they affect sexual function, but declines in testosterone may weaken a woman's libido and orgasms. The fact that estrogen declines more than testosterone leads some to believe that libido should *not* decline at menopause. The decline in testosterone in women is solely age related, not menopause related, and begins years before perimenopause.

### Is there a testosterone product for women?

There is currently no testosterone product approved for women in the United States. The government is waiting for more long-term safety data. Because testosterone is converted to estrogen in the blood, some experts think that testosterone therapy might have similar risks as systemic estrogen therapy (such as breast cancer and heart disease).

Other countries, however, have approved the testosterone patch for treating low sexual desire in surgically menopausal women who are also on estrogen therapy.

### Beware of products not approved for women.

- *Men's testosterone products:* Prescription products developed for men (such as Androderm, Testoderm, and AndroGel) contain doses that are too high for women. Sometimes, however, these products are prescribed off label for women at about one-tenth the daily dose prescribed for men.
- *DHEA.* Another natural androgen hormone, dehydroepiandrosterone (DHEA), is available as a nonprescription supplement in the United States. It has been marketed as a way to improve libido, vaginal atrophy, arousal, and orgasm in women. But these claims are not endorsed by the government and are not supported by evidence. More information is also needed on the long-term safety of DHEA, which has been associated with many of the same side effects in women as testosterone.

### Where can I learn more information about sexual health and testosterone?

See *Sexual Health & Menopause* on the The North American Menopause Society's website at: <http://www.menopause.org/for-women/-em-sexual-health-menopause-em-online>.

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