



CORE FUNCTION HEALTH

THE MEN'S HEALTH GUIDE

Could Low Testosterone Be Affecting How You Feel?

What's inside this guide

How testosterone affects energy, mood, body composition, and sexual health

The full picture: sleep, thyroid, stress, and metabolic health

A complete symptom checklist you can bring to your visit

What causes low testosterone — and what doesn't

How low T is actually diagnosed

Evidence-based habits that support healthy hormone levels

What evaluation and treatment can look like at Core Function Health

A functional & integrative medicine resource for men who want real answers — not just "normal" labs.

Could Low Testosterone Be Affecting How You Feel?

Many men assume fatigue, weight gain, loss of muscle, or a lower sex drive are simply part of getting older. It's true that testosterone naturally declines with age — on average, about 1% per year after age 30 — but a slow, expected decline is very different from the kind of persistent, quality-of-life-limiting symptoms that bring most men into our office.

Testosterone is also only one piece of a much larger picture. Sleep quality, thyroid function, chronic stress, nutrition, certain medications, and overall metabolic health all influence how you feel day to day — and often overlap with "low T" symptoms closely enough that testosterone gets blamed when something else is actually driving the problem. A thorough evaluation looks at the whole system, not just one number on a lab report.

This guide walks through what testosterone actually does in the body, the full range of symptoms it can cause, what tends to drive it down, how it's properly diagnosed, and the lifestyle foundations that support healthy hormone levels — whether or not medical treatment ends up being part of your plan.

Understanding Testosterone's Role in the Body

Testosterone is often thought of as simply the "male sex hormone," but its reach extends far beyond libido. It plays an active role in nearly every major system:

- Musculoskeletal health — supports muscle protein synthesis, strength, and bone density
- Body composition — influences how the body partitions fat versus lean tissue, particularly around the midsection
- Energy and metabolism — contributes to red blood cell production and metabolic rate
- Cognitive function — affects focus, motivation, and verbal and spatial memory
- Mood regulation — interacts with neurotransmitter systems tied to mood and drive
- Cardiovascular health — has effects on vascular tone and lipid metabolism
- Sexual health — drives libido, erectile function, and fertility
- Sleep architecture — testosterone production itself is tightly tied to deep sleep stages, creating a two-way relationship

Because testosterone touches so many systems, low levels rarely show up as a single, isolated symptom. More often, men describe a cluster of subtle changes that build gradually — which is exactly why the symptoms are so easy to write off as "just getting older" or "just stress."

Common Symptoms of Low Testosterone

Symptoms vary from person to person, and severity doesn't always correlate directly with lab values. Common categories include:

Physical

- Low energy or persistent fatigue
- Reduced muscle mass or strength, even with continued training

- Increased body fat, particularly around the abdomen
- Poor workout recovery
- Loss of morning erections

Sexual

- Low sex drive or libido
- Erectile dysfunction
- Reduced fertility or semen volume

Cognitive & Emotional

- Brain fog or difficulty concentrating
- Mood changes, including irritability or low mood
- Reduced motivation or drive
- Diminished sense of well-being or confidence

Sleep & Recovery

- Poor sleep quality or trouble staying asleep
- Waking unrefreshed despite adequate hours in bed

What Causes Low Testosterone?

Low testosterone isn't a single condition with a single cause. Broadly, it falls into a few categories:

Age-related decline

A gradual, expected decrease beginning around the mid-30s. This alone doesn't always require treatment, but it's worth tracking, especially alongside symptoms.

Primary hypogonadism

The testes themselves aren't producing adequate testosterone, due to genetic conditions, injury, infection, prior chemotherapy or radiation, or other testicular disorders.

Secondary hypogonadism

The signal from the brain (via the pituitary and hypothalamus) isn't adequately stimulating testosterone production. This can be driven by obesity, chronic stress, certain medications (including opioids and some hormonal therapies), pituitary disorders, significant weight loss or over-restriction, or excessive exercise without adequate recovery.

Lifestyle and metabolic contributors

- Poor sleep quality or insufficient sleep duration
- Chronic, unmanaged stress and elevated cortisol
- Excess body fat, particularly visceral fat, which increases conversion of testosterone to estrogen
- Sedentary lifestyle and lack of resistance training

- Excess alcohol intake
- Nutrient deficiencies, including zinc, vitamin D, and adequate dietary fat and protein
- Uncontrolled blood sugar or insulin resistance

Medications and medical conditions

Opioids, some antidepressants, corticosteroids, and certain hormonal medications can lower testosterone. So can chronic illness, obstructive sleep apnea, thyroid dysfunction, and pituitary or testicular disorders — which is why a proper workup looks well beyond a single testosterone level.

Beyond Testosterone: The Bigger Picture

Because so many of these symptoms overlap across systems, an experienced evaluation looks at testosterone in context — not in isolation.

Thyroid Health

An underactive thyroid produces fatigue, weight gain, brain fog, low mood, and low libido that can look nearly identical to low testosterone. Comprehensive thyroid testing (not just TSH) is a routine part of a thorough men's health workup.

Sleep

The majority of daily testosterone release happens during deep sleep. Poor sleep quality — including undiagnosed sleep apnea — can suppress testosterone on its own, and low testosterone can, in turn, worsen sleep. Treating a sleep disorder is sometimes the single most effective intervention for hormone symptoms.

Stress and Cortisol

Chronic stress keeps cortisol elevated, and cortisol and testosterone operate on something of a metabolic seesaw. Prolonged high stress can suppress the hypothalamic-pituitary-gonadal axis that regulates testosterone production.

Metabolic Health

Insulin resistance, elevated blood sugar, and excess visceral fat are closely linked to lower testosterone — and low testosterone, in turn, makes it harder to build muscle and manage weight, creating a cycle that's difficult to break without addressing both sides.

Quick Symptom Checklist

Check any that apply, and bring this list with you to your visit:

- ☐ Low energy or fatigue
- ☐ Low libido
- ☐ Erectile dysfunction or loss of morning erections
- ☐ Brain fog or trouble concentrating
- ☐ Unexplained weight gain, especially around the midsection
- ☐ Loss of muscle mass or strength despite training
- ☐ Poor workout recovery
- ☐ Poor sleep quality or waking unrefreshed
- ☐ Mood changes, irritability, or low mood
- ☐ Reduced motivation or drive

How Low Testosterone Is Diagnosed

A proper evaluation involves more than a single blood draw. A comprehensive workup typically includes:

Marker	Why It Matters
Total & Free Testosterone	Measured on an early-morning fasting draw, ideally on two separate occasions, since levels fluctuate throughout the day.
SHBG	Sex hormone-binding globulin affects how much testosterone is biologically available.
LH & FSH	Pituitary hormones that help distinguish primary from secondary causes.
Estradiol	Excess conversion of testosterone to estrogen can drive symptoms on its own.
Complete Thyroid Panel	TSH, Free T4, Free T3, and antibodies as indicated.
Metabolic Panel	Fasting glucose, insulin, and HbA1c to assess insulin resistance.
CBC & Iron Studies	Baseline safety labs and a check for anemia, which can mimic fatigue-related symptoms.
Vitamin D, Zinc	Common nutrient deficiencies linked to low testosterone.
PSA	Prostate-specific antigen, a standard baseline and monitoring marker for men considering treatment.

Symptoms plus consistently low levels on repeat testing — not a single number — are what guide a diagnosis. This is also why a same-day walk-in lab result isn't the whole story: timing, fasting status, and repeat confirmation all matter.

Approaches to Treatment

Treatment is never one-size-fits-all, and it isn't always medication. A thoughtful plan typically starts with identifying and addressing underlying contributors, then layers in additional support as needed:

- Foundational lifestyle changes — sleep, training, nutrition, and stress management, addressed in detail below
- Treating contributing conditions — such as sleep apnea, thyroid dysfunction, or insulin resistance
- Nutrient repletion — correcting deficiencies in vitamin D, zinc, or other relevant nutrients
- Medical therapy when appropriate — which may include testosterone replacement therapy or other options, individualized to your labs, symptoms, and goals, along with a monitoring plan for safety and effectiveness

Because testosterone therapy affects fertility, red blood cell production, and prostate markers, it requires ongoing monitoring. This is discussed in detail during your evaluation so you can make an informed decision about what's right for you.

Healthy Habits That Support Hormone Health

Whether or not medical treatment is part of your plan, these foundations meaningfully support healthy testosterone levels and overall well-being:

Strength Training

Resistance training, particularly compound movements like squats, deadlifts, and presses, is one of the most consistently supported lifestyle interventions for supporting healthy testosterone and preserving muscle mass.

Prioritize Quality Sleep

Aim for 7–9 hours of consistent, quality sleep. Since most testosterone release happens during deep sleep, both duration and quality matter — a consistent sleep schedule and good sleep hygiene make a meaningful difference.

Eat Adequate Protein — and Adequate Fat

Protein supports muscle maintenance and recovery, while adequate dietary fat provides the building blocks for hormone production. Very low-fat diets can actually work against healthy hormone levels.

Manage Stress

Chronic stress and elevated cortisol work against testosterone production. Regular stress-management practices — whether that's exercise, breathwork, time outdoors, or simply protecting downtime — support the hormonal balance underlying how you feel.

Maintain a Healthy Weight

Excess body fat, especially visceral fat, increases the conversion of testosterone to estrogen. Sustainable, gradual fat loss (rather than extreme restriction) tends to support hormone health better than crash dieting.

Stay Active

Beyond structured workouts, regular daily movement supports insulin sensitivity, cardiovascular health, and mood — all of which indirectly support hormone balance.

Limit Excess Alcohol

Heavy or frequent alcohol use can directly suppress testosterone production and disrupt sleep quality.

Treat Sleep Disorders When Present

If you snore heavily, wake gasping for air, or feel unrefreshed despite adequate time in bed, ask about a sleep apnea evaluation. Treating obstructive sleep apnea can significantly improve both symptoms and testosterone levels.

Frequently Asked Questions

Is low testosterone just a normal part of aging?

Some decline is expected with age, but persistent, quality-of-life-limiting symptoms are not something you simply have to accept. Evaluation can clarify what's driving your symptoms and what can realistically be improved.

Can lifestyle changes alone raise testosterone?

For some men, addressing sleep, weight, stress, and nutrient deficiencies meaningfully improves levels and symptoms. For others, especially with more significant hormonal deficiency, lifestyle changes are an important foundation but not sufficient on their own — this is something your evaluation will help clarify.

What if my testosterone comes back "normal"?

"Normal" reference ranges are broad and based on a general population, not on what's optimal for how you feel. A comprehensive evaluation looks at your full hormone panel, symptoms, and other contributing systems — not just whether one number falls inside a wide reference range.

Do I need testosterone therapy to feel better?

Not necessarily. Many men see meaningful improvement by addressing sleep, thyroid function, stress, and metabolic health first. Medical therapy is one tool among several, used when it's the right fit for your labs, symptoms, and goals.

Next Step

If any of these symptoms sound familiar, a comprehensive evaluation can help determine whether hormones — or another underlying factor — may be contributing to how you feel. We look at the full picture: hormones, thyroid, sleep, metabolic health, and lifestyle, so you get answers, not just a lab printout.

Ready to find out what's really going on?

Book a free 15-minute discovery call at www.corefunctionhealth.com

Or reach out directly at 562-248-6546

Medical Disclaimer

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