

Ask Leyla: What's causing my low testosterone?



Q: I've been told I have lower-than-normal testosterone levels. Can you shed some light on what might cause that and if there is anything I can do to help raise my testosterone levels?

A: Many things can lower testosterone levels, and it mainly has to do with lifestyle factors.

Are you overweight? At the top of the list is insulin resistance (aka, prediabetes, diabetes, metabolic syndrome) with its hallmark symptom, belly fat. You know, that spare tire or beer belly you've been living with, thinking *This is just part of middle age*. It's not.

Abdominal fat cells secrete chemicals that *aromatize* circulating testosterone turning it into estrogen, effectively decreasing it. The best way to cure insulin resistance is with a low-carb, high-fat diet and strength training. Yes, cardio too, but please give equal time to strength training. To boot, doing squats or deep knee bends has been shown to raise testosterone levels.

Another suspect in low testosterone is heavy drinking. What's defined as heavy drinking? Two and a half or more alcoholic beverages per day. Alcohol lowers testosterone. Take notice next time you visit your local pub. The male regulars—assumed heavy drinkers—will have a full head of hair. That's due to low testosterone. Over time they may develop gynecomastia too (male breasts). Marijuana also quashes testosterone, in much the same way alcohol does.

Finally, a vegan diet that depends heavily on soy products (tofu, mock meats, soymilk) can lower testosterone. The phytoestrogens in soy compete with circulating testosterone levels—and usually win.

So, embarking on a low-carb, high-fat diet, strength training, limiting or eliminating alcohol and marijuana use, and reducing soy intake can help normalize testosterone levels.

To your health!

Leyla Muedin, MS, RD, CDN