

TAKE THIS ISSUE HOME!

VA



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Veterans Health Administration
VA Sunshine Healthcare Network (VISN 8)

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VETERANS Health

MATTERS

*Award Winning Wellness Magazine for VISN 8 Veterans
in Florida, South Georgia, Puerto Rico & the U.S. Virgin Islands*



Your Hormones –
Working Hard Every Day

Low Testosterone Myths

What's an Anti-
Inflammatory Diet?

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To Our Readers



In this issue, we explore how hormones work hard every day to help us thrive and stay healthy.

Hormones are chemical messengers that travel through the bloodstream. They keep all parts of the body working together, like a well tuned engine. Read on pages four and five about the vital role these amazing substances play, and what you can do to help keep your hormones in balance. We'll also take a closer look at male and female-specific hormones, and review some low-testosterone myths on page three.

Chronic inflammation in the body plays a role in many chronic diseases that our Veterans experience firsthand. These include heart disease, type 2 diabetes, inflammatory bowel disease, and many others. On page six, find out how your food choices can help keep inflammation levels in check. Then, check out the soup recipe that uses anti-inflammatory ingredients on page seven.

Finally, we hope you have some "brain fun" with the word search puzzle also on page seven.

Be well!

Miguel H. LaPuz, M.D., MBA
Network Director, VISN 8



Get Started Today!



Whole Health means thinking about and approaching your health in a new way. Through conversations and courses, VA staff will get to know you. They will work with you to set health and well-being goals based on your needs and what matters to you.

Whole Health puts you, not your symptoms, at the center of your care decisions.

To start your Whole Health journey, ask your provider about meeting with a Whole Health coach. Whole Health coaches are a part of Patient Aligned Care Teams (PACTs) at all VISN 8 facilities. When you meet with a coach, he/she will talk to you about your needs, concerns, and goals.

Maybe you want to wake up with less pain, change careers, reduce stress, move more, or something else that's affecting your health. You can start by talking with your health care provider and Whole Health coach. Learn more about Whole Health at www.va.gov/wholehealth.

Low Testosterone Myth Busters



Have you seen the ads or heard the hype at the gym about taking testosterone (T) supplements? Are you concerned about having low T levels as you get older?

Separating fact from fiction about the benefits of taking T supplements is hard.



Myth: Low testosterone is a normal part of aging.

FACT: Low testosterone can happen at any age. And, it's true that testosterone levels naturally drop as you age, compared to when you were a teenager. But that doesn't mean you have an *inadequate* amount of testosterone.

Myth: Low testosterone only affects a man's sex drive.

FACT: Yes, low testosterone levels reduce a man's sex drive and the ability to get or keep an erection. But there are many other effects as well, including mood changes, less energy, muscle loss, and weak bones.



Myth: It's OK to take testosterone supplements or therapy.

FACT: That depends. Testosterone therapy is not recommended for men who have normal testosterone levels. There are health risks, especially when taking extra testosterone for a long time. These include elevated levels of red blood cells, sleep apnea, and an increase in prostate size.

Testosterone therapy prescribed by a doctor can be effective for those who have low testosterone levels, plus a drop in sex drive or erectile dysfunction (ED). Testosterone therapy must be done correctly and monitored regularly. Only testosterone hormones approved by the US Food and Drug Administration should be used.

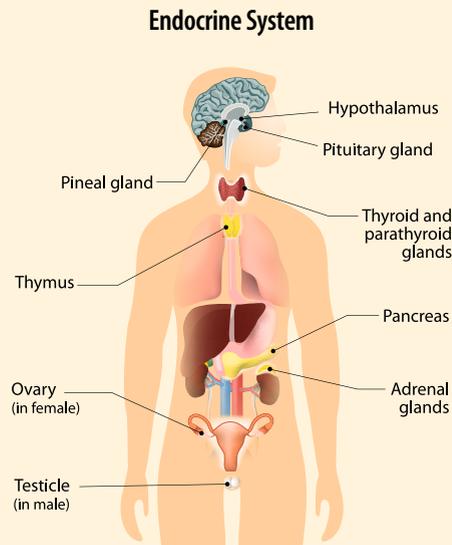
For more information about low testosterone and the best ways to manage it, talk with your VA health care team.

Your Hormones

Working hard every day for your health

Hormones are Everywhere

Hormones affect every part of your life. They are chemical messengers that travel through your blood to reach specific organs. Hormones tell organs what to do, when to do it, and for how long to do it. Your body makes hormones in the glands of your endocrine system.



Hormone-Producing Glands	Main Functions
Hypothalamus	Tells pituitary gland to start or stop making hormones.
Pituitary (master control gland)	Controls other glands, and produces growth and development hormones.
Pineal	Produces melatonin which affects the sleep cycle.
Thyroid	Regulates calorie burning and heart rate.
Parathyroid	Controls calcium levels in the body.
Thymus	Helps immune system develop during puberty.
Pancreas	Produces insulin which controls blood sugar.
Adrenal	Produces cortisol (stress hormone) and helps regulate sex drive.
Ovary (women)	Regulates reproductive cycles and sex drive; produces female sex hormones.
Testicle (men)	Regulates sex drive; produces male sex hormones.

A Balancing Act

When our hormones are in balance, they help our bodies thrive, like a well-tuned engine. There are also times when hormones naturally fluctuate - during puberty, pregnancy, menopause, and as a person gets older. But, when hormone levels are too high or too low for a long time, that can lead to health problems. These include diabetes, heart disease, cancer, weak bones, and stress-related disorders, like anxiety. Difficulty sleeping and changes in appetite can also occur. Infections and exposure to certain chemicals also play a role in hormone health. Family history and some lifestyle habits can also affect hormone levels.

What Can I Do to Improve Hormone Balance?



Hormone health is a hot topic these days. There is so much media hype about which products or approaches you should use to improve your hormone levels.

If you are concerned about hormone health, talk with your VA health care team for evaluation and treatment options, including self-care activities that may help. Taking steps toward a healthier lifestyle is always a good place to start:

- **Strive for a Healthy Weight** – Extra weight puts more stress on your body, which needs to work harder to stay healthy.
- **Eat Healthy** – Choose a nutritious diet with lots of variety.
- **Move** – Exercise and find ways to move your body on a regular basis.
- **Recharge** – Get enough quality sleep and learn ways to reduce stress and relax.

Hormone Spotlight: Estrogen & Progesterone in Women



The female sex hormones, estrogen and progesterone, regulate women's reproductive health: menstruation, pregnancy, menopause, and more. These hormones help control the growth of breasts. Estrogen also helps keep cholesterol in check and protects bone health.

Signs of Estrogen/Progesterone Imbalance

- Heavy, irregular, or painful periods.
- Hot flashes and night sweats.
- Vaginal dryness.
- Infertility or difficulty in getting pregnant.
- Weight gain.
- Hair thinning or loss.
- Vaginal bleeding (not related to menstrual bleeding).

Treatment

- (Options vary depending what caused the imbalance)
- Medications to stimulate ovulation for women trying to become pregnant.
 - Medications to reduce hot flashes, night sweats, and excessive hair growth or loss.
 - Vaginal estrogen to reduce vaginal dryness.
 - Hormone Therapy (HT) to manage severe symptoms of hormone imbalance.

Hormone Spotlight: Testosterone in Men



The male sex hormone, testosterone, causes physical changes when boys grow into adult males. Testosterone helps maintain muscles and bones, produce sperm and sex drive, and erections.

Signs of Testosterone Imbalance

- Drop in sex drive.
- Inability to get or keep an erection for sexual intercourse.
- Low sperm count/male infertility.
- Prostate concerns, including enlarged prostate.
- Loss of muscle strength and hair.
- Mood changes.

Treatment

- (Options vary depending on what caused the imbalance)
- Testosterone replacement therapy:
 - Gel or skin patch.
 - Injections.
 - Tablets.
 - Pellets inserted under the skin.

Did You Know?

Testosterone is also produced in women. It works with estrogen to help regulate the growth and maintenance of female reproductive tissue and bone mass. Likewise, men have estrogen too, but in smaller amounts than women. Estrogen in men works on maintaining male sexual and reproductive functions.

More on Hormone Therapy

If you have signs of an imbalance with these sex hormones, talk to your VA provider. Finding the cause of the imbalance is the first step in getting the best treatment based on your needs and preferences. If you are considering HT, it's important to weigh the pros and cons with the help of your provider before deciding if it's right for you.



Watch the Video!

Check out the video, "Your Hormones – Working Hard Every Day for Your Health" at www.visn8.va.gov/VISN8/news/publications.asp.

What's an Anti-Inflammatory Diet?

Inflammation is one way your body helps fight infections and speeds up healing. Inflammation also lets you know that something is wrong, like when you feel pain. But, when inflammation levels get too high, or last too long and become chronic, they can lead to disease. Chronic inflammation is linked to heart disease, inflammatory bowel disease, type 2 diabetes, obesity, and cancer.

An anti-inflammatory diet includes foods and eating tips that help prevent and keep chronic inflammation in check.

In a nutshell, anti-inflammatory foods include many of the same foods found in an overall healthy pattern of eating.

The following foods and tips will help you maximize the anti-inflammatory power of your diet:



Anti-Inflammation Eating Tips:

EAT MORE:

- Plant-based proteins – beans, lentils, nuts, seeds, and tofu.
- Brightly colored veggies and fruit – dark leafy greens, carrots, broccoli, berries, and cherries.
- Fiber – bran cereal, brown rice, oatmeal, quinoa, beans, and nuts.
- Healthy fats – salmon, walnuts, olive and canola oil, and avocados.
- Herbs and spices – paprika, rosemary, ginger, turmeric, sage, and cumin.

EAT LESS:

- Processed meats – deli meats, bacon, hot dogs, and sausage.
- High fat meats – fatty beef or pork, chicken with skin.
- Trans fats and partially-hydrogenated oils – pastries, snack crackers, and fried foods.
- High sugar items – Candy, sweets, and soda.
- High fat dairy – regular cheese, butter, cream, and full fat milk.

Other ways to help prevent chronic inflammation include:

- Achieve and maintain a healthy weight.
- Be physically active.
- Get enough quality sleep.

Word Search

Find these words from the stories in this issue.
Remember to look up, down, and backwards. Good luck!

COACH	T	K	B	S	C	P	P	U	M	R	N
ENDOCRINE	E	S	T	R	O	G	E	N	C	F	O
ESTROGEN	S	G	E	E	H	L	Q	T	I	M	I
FIBER	T	V	N	G	Z	W	A	D	F	E	T
GINGER	O	F	I	N	L	P	U	K	B	T	A
HORMONE	S	T	R	E	S	S	E	G	C	A	M
INFLAMMATION	T	L	C	S	P	V	N	I	X	B	M
MESSENGERS	E	A	O	S	G	J	O	N	I	O	A
METABOLISM	R	K	D	E	P	Q	M	G	T	L	L
STRESS	O	W	N	M	Y	D	R	E	B	I	F
TESTOSTERONE	N	L	E	H	J	T	O	R	V	S	N
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Healing Carrot Soup with Turmeric & Ginger

Watch how to make this anti-inflammatory soup on YouTube:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=bqA7-SMtXEk

Ingredients

- 4 carrots, peeled and chopped
- 1 parsnip, peeled and chopped
- 1 yellow onion, chopped
- 4 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 teaspoons olive oil
- 3 cups low-sodium vegetable broth
- 1 teaspoon turmeric powder
- 1 teaspoon ginger root, finely grated
- Juice from 1/2 of a lemon



Directions

1. Place chopped carrots, parsnip, onion, and garlic on a baking sheet. Toss with oil and turmeric to evenly coat vegetables.
2. Bake at 350 degrees F for 15-20 minutes or until tender.
3. Transfer roasted vegetables to a blender. Add warm broth, lemon juice, and ginger. Blend until smooth and creamy. Garnish with Greek yogurt, black sesame seeds, coconut flakes, and fresh parsley.

If you don't have a blender, place roasted vegetables in a large bowl, and use a potato masher to mash together. Add remaining ingredients and use a large whisk to blend until smooth. The soup may be a bit lumpy, but still delicious!

Nutritional information: (2 servings). Per serving (no garnish): 201 calories, 5 g total fat, 1 g saturated fat, 38 g carbohydrates, 11 g dietary fiber, 3 g protein, and 324 mg sodium.

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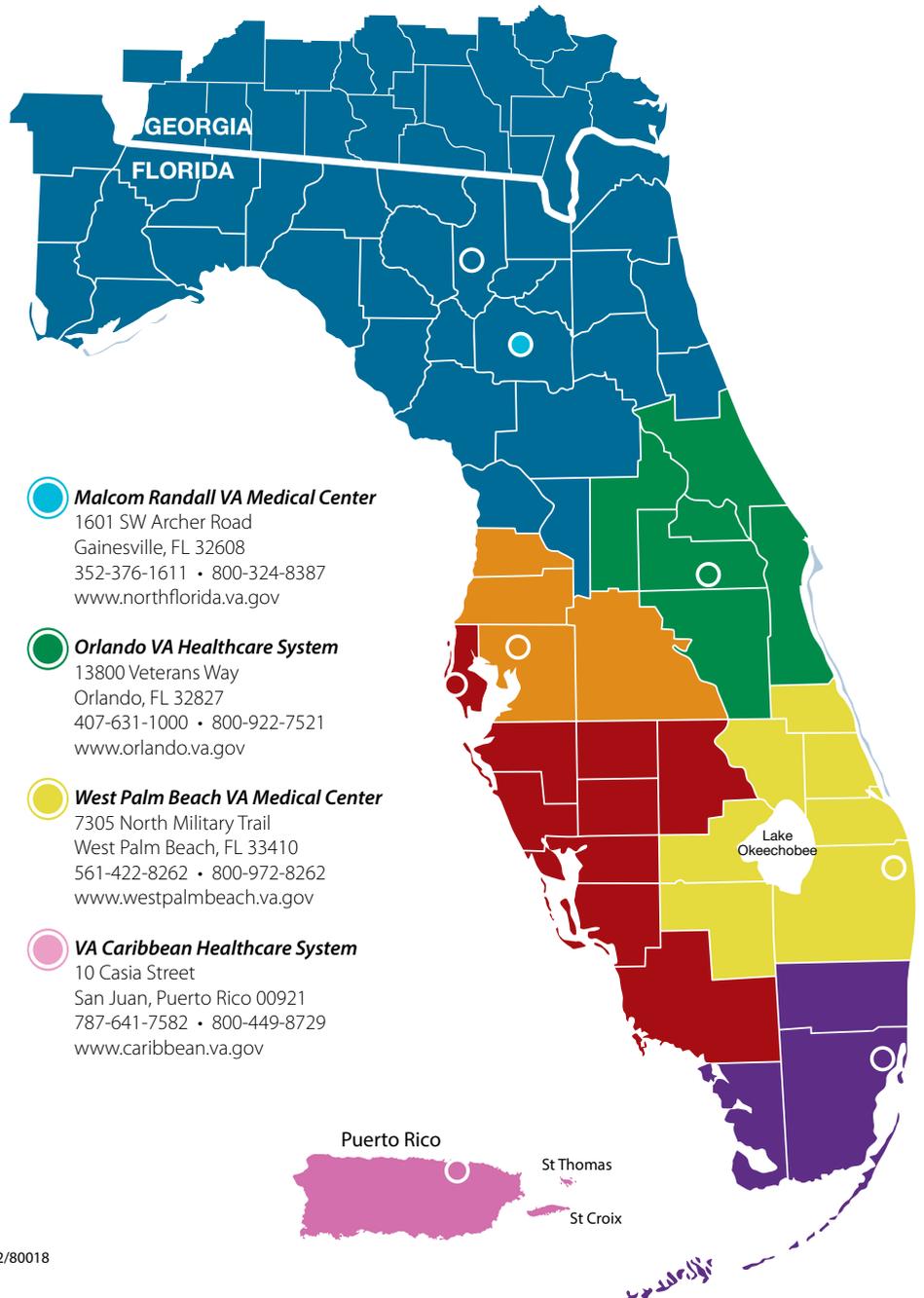


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