

The male menopause: genuine condition or moneymaking myth?

Level 3: Advanced

1 Warmer

run in the family (idiom): be common in a particular family, especially a characteristic or medical condition

a. Discuss the questions.

1. What diseases run in your family?
2. How do you keep your mind and body healthy?
3. Do you think you will care for your health differently as you age? Why (not)?

2 Key words

a. Fill the gaps in the sentences using these key words from the text.

acute charlatan clinical condition downstream endocrinology estrogen
exclusively libido menopause mood swing occurrence onset
physiology precipitous predisposed testosterone underlying

1. _____ happens when a woman is about 50 years old and stops menstruating.
2. A _____ is a disease with clear signs and symptoms.
3. _____ is romantic desire.
4. A noticeable or sudden mood change is a _____.
5. _____ is a branch of medicine that studies hormones.
6. Something very serious or severe is _____.
7. _____ is the scientific study of how living things function.
8. _____ is a hormone produced by the testes that causes men to develop into men with male characteristics.
9. _____ drop is extreme and sudden.
10. _____ is a hormone produced by a woman's ovaries that causes them to develop into women and prepare their bodies to have babies.

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11. An _____ is something that happens.
12. The beginning of something, often unpleasant, is its _____.
13. If something is limited to a single person, group, or use, it is _____ for that person, group, or use.
14. A _____ is someone who claims to have knowledge or skills they don't have.
15. The actual cause of something, which may be hidden at first, is the _____ reason.
16. When something happens because of something that happened earlier, it is a _____ effect.
17. If it is likely you will have a particular illness or condition, you are _____ to it.

b. Complete the sentences with words from the previous activity. You might have to change the form of the word.

1. The common cold and the flu are _____ illnesses.
2. Toddlers might be happy one minute and crying the next, but these _____ are a normal part of their development.
3. At this clinic, it is a common _____ to treat infections.
4. This toilet is _____ for families.
5. He thought he just had a fever, but the _____ cause was Lyme disease.
6. Certain genetic factors can _____ people to specific health conditions and diseases.
7. Early-_____ dementia or Alzheimer's is when symptoms begin before age 65.
8. Don't trust the medical advice on the Dr Dave TV show. He's a complete _____ without any medical training.
9. When she started getting hot flashes regularly, she knew that it was the _____.
10. Medical students take courses on the _____ of the systems and organs of the human body to understand their normal functions.

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11. During menopause, some women receive _____ therapy to help with their symptoms.
12. Artificially high _____ levels can result in mood swings and aggressive behaviour.

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Experts say there is no equivalent of the menopause for men, and symptoms such as depression and low sex drive have other explanations

Nicola Davis

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- 1 This week brought reports that “male menopause” policies are in place at several NHS trusts, with some HR managers suggesting staff could receive up to a year of sick pay if they experience symptoms. This is despite the NHS itself saying male menopause is not a clinical condition and that it is not national NHS policy to offer leave for it.
- 2 We take a look at the science behind the term.
- 3 **What is meant by the “male menopause”?**

The male menopause, also known as the andropause, is a term used to refer to a group of features seen in some men in their late 40s to early 50s, such as depression, loss of libido, mood swings, problems sleeping and loss of muscle mass.
- 4 However the NHS notes this is not a clinical condition. Rather, it says, it is an “unhelpful term sometimes used in the media”.
- 5 **So this isn’t a male version of what women go through?**

In a word, no.
- 6 Dr Ravinder Anand-Ivell, associate professor of endocrinology and reproductive physiology at the University of Nottingham and an expert of the European Academy of Andrology, says that the two are quite different.
- 7 She goes on to explain that menopause represents acute symptoms caused by the end of hormonal function in the ovaries “due to the exhaustion of a woman’s egg reserve at around 50 plus or minus five years. Men have no equivalent physiology.”
- 8 Prof Richard Sharpe, an expert in male reproductive disorders from the University of Edinburgh, agreed.
- 9 “There is no question that, in normal men at the population level, blood testosterone levels decline with age from late 30s to early 40s onwards,” he said. “However, there is no precipitous fall in blood testosterone levels akin to that which occurs for estrogen levels in women at the menopause.”
- 10 Sharpe also stressed that some men may experience little blood testosterone decline when ageing. “It can be quite variable between individuals – unlike the 100% occurrence of menopause in women,” he said.
- 11 **Does that mean the “male menopause” is made up?**

Not exactly.
- 12 “There is a condition in some elderly men, known as ‘late onset hypogonadism’ or more recently called ‘functional hypogonadism’, which is characterised by low concentrations of testosterone in the blood together with symptoms of low testosterone such as loss of libido, bone and muscle weakness, etc.,” said Anand-Ivell.
- 13 But, she added, this occurs in approximately 2.1% of men, almost exclusively over the age of 65.
- 14 While some men with late-onset hypogonadism (LOH) may benefit from testosterone replacement therapy, its wider use has caused controversy. Some experts have raised concerns that it is being given to patients who have some similar symptoms to LOH but may have blood testosterone levels within the normal range for that age group.
- 15 “This is what I refer to as a ‘charlatan’s charter’; as such, general symptoms will occur in most men during – and before – ageing but are almost always driven by other factors,” said Sharpe.
- 16 **So, what is behind this cluster of symptoms?**

Anand-Ivell said men who reported sudden symptoms, and at a younger age, might well be experiencing another underlying health problem.
- 17 Indeed, as the NHS notes, features that have been linked to a “male menopause” could be down to lifestyle factors or psychological problems.

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- 18 “For example, erectile dysfunction, low sex drive and mood swings may be the result of stress, depression or anxiety,” the NHS says, adding other causes of erectile dysfunction include smoking or heart problems.
- 19 Financial and life worries may also play a role in the symptoms some men experience during ageing, as could poor diet, lack of sleep and low self-esteem, the NHS notes.
- 20 Sharpe added that conditions such as obesity, and its downstream disorders, were also generally associated with lower blood testosterone levels in men, with some arguing it might predispose them to further weight gain.
- 21 As for treatment, Prof Frederick Wu of Manchester Royal Infirmary said the approach was threefold: “Lifestyle change, weight loss and improve general health,” he said.
- 22 **Why is the male menopause getting attention?**
- Experts say a key reason the “male menopause” is a hot topic is money.
- 23 Anand-Ivell said: “A lot of the ‘andropause’ literature stems from commercial interests, particularly in the USA, wishing to draw false comparisons with the female menopause in order to sell testosterone-related products for which there is no clinical evidence of benefit.”
- 24 The latest headlines, meanwhile, have been fuelled by the revelation that male menopause policies are in place at several NHS trusts.
- 25 Sharpe said: “For myself, I am amazed that any health board would even talk about there being an andropause, let alone suggesting time off.”

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b. Write four sentences using *may* and *might* to talk about possibility or probability. Give additional information to support your tone if needed.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- “It is unethical to create a medical condition for commercial gain.”
- “Women do not have enough access to menopause-related care and leave.”
- “There should be consumer protections against false health claims in the media.”

6 In your own words

a. Do some research about menopause.

- What are some of the symptoms?
- What age are most women when it happens?
- Which countries offer sick leave and/or other support for menopausal women?
- Why doesn't society talk about it more?

b. Report your findings to the class and share your opinion.

Here are some phrases to help you when you talk about facts:

According to the experts, ...

The research proved/disproved ...

The doctors learned ...

The facts/data showed ...

They still need to learn more about ...

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Here are some phrases to use when stating your opinion.

I think (that) ...

I want to understand why ...

From my perspective, ...

In my understanding/opinion, ...

I (dis)agree with ...