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Sex drive in a pack

No need for needles. A new testosterone gel gives men with low libido the instant boost they need

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gets men up and going



The gel, which contains testosterone, gives men lacking in the male sex hormone an instant boost to their energy levels and sex drive when applied every day.



Ng Wan Ching

A small amount of clear gel applied every day has revived his sex drive and saved his sex life.

But no, Mr D. K. Lau, 59, was not suffering from erectile dysfunction. What he has is testosterone deficiency syndrome (TDS), something which affects one in four men aged 45 and above here.

Erectile dysfunction is the inability to develop or sustain an erection. It is one of a whole host of symptoms of men with low testosterone levels. However, not all cases

of erectile dysfunction are caused by low testosterone levels.

The good news for men with low levels of testosterone is that there is a non-invasive treatment option now.

It comes in the form of a gel containing testosterone, which is applied on parts of the body that are clothed such as the abdomen, back, arms or thighs.

It has given Mr Lau his life back as he remembered it.

1 in **4**
men here aged 45 and
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syndrome

From tired to fired

Before going on testosterone replacement therapy, he was too tired at the end of each evening to do anything.

“I also had mood swings. For no rhyme or reason, I would feel upset. When I sat down, I would tend to doze off,” said the businessman.

He managed to have sex with his wife maybe once every two weeks.

His symptoms had crept up on him so slowly he thought it was all part of growing older which he could do nothing about.

One day, while talking with friends about ageing, someone mentioned how testosterone replacement could be rejuvenating.

“Then they mentioned needles and injections and I said forget it. I’m afraid of needles,” he said.

Then he heard about the gel.

He went to see a general practitioner, who tested his testosterone level and found it below normal. He was prescribed Androgel.

“The change was almost immediate. I don’t feel so tired any more. I lose weight more easily and I wake up with an erection, something which has not happened for a long time,” he said.

He has also upped his sexual activity to twice a week.

An alternative to Viagra

About 1½ years ago, Mr Max Lee, 47, a businessman, had similar symptoms to Mr Lau’s.

He was told by his doctor that his lack of energy and sexual dysfunction might be due to stress.

He was so tired every night he could not find the energy even to talk to his wife and son. “I could not do even simple things like

housework,” he said.

He resorted to Viagra to try to improve relations with his wife.

“But I would get a headache during sex and the headache would persist afterwards. After a while, I gave up,” he said.

A few months ago, while consulting a doctor for another matter, he mentioned his low energy and libido levels.

The doctor did a blood test. The result was very low testosterone levels and he was prescribed Androgel. He noticed the difference immediately. “It’s like taking essence of chicken, but many times better,” he said.

He now jogs in the evenings and plays badminton with his son. “I have the type of energy that I remember from my younger days when you can party all night and still be up and ready to go the next day,” he said. He feels refreshed after four or five hours of sleep.

His wife is also happier.

“I have the energy to talk and listen to her. It’s more important than sex. She works in a bank and when there are lots of problems at work, she wants to pour her heart out to me when she gets home,” he said.

Their sex life is also more active. “Before, I used to have sex about once a month with my wife. That year, she did not notice anything because she was busy helping our son prepare for his PSLE. Now the frequency is about twice a week,” he said.

Since a public health forum on men's health was held at the Khoo Teck Puat Hospital last month, more men have been turning up at the hospital and asking Dr Colin Teo about TDS and the gel.

Said Dr Teo, a consultant urologist: "The gel gives men and doctors a choice."

The gel is applied every day or every other day, according to the dosage prescribed by the doctor. This is determined after a blood test is done to see what their testosterone levels are.

Avoiding painful injections

Another testosterone replacement therapy is a long-acting testosterone injection called Nebido, which lasts three months per shot.

"If you don't want to be on long-term testosterone replacement therapy, you can use the gel and see how it goes. The gel gives us the ability to hit and run," said Dr Teo.

In his practice, he has found that executives and younger men prefer gel.

"It's not just about the needle phobia. For this group of men, coming to hospital and dropping their pants for the nurse to give them the injection is not the most cool thing to do," said Dr Teo.

Dr Peter Lim, consultant urologist and president of the Society of Men's Health, said he is seeing more and more patients with testosterone deficiency.

"Every day, I see four of five such lab test results. As the population ages, I am sure I will see more," he said.

The gel is an excellent alternative for his patients at his Gleneagles Medical Centre practice who find the injection hard to take, he said.

"It's one of the most painful injections to have. The liquid is very thick and viscous. We teach doctors to give it slowly, so it takes about 10 minutes to complete an injection," he said.

Since the gel was launched here in July last year, his patients have been enthusiastically opting for it over the injection. Now about half of his patients are on the gel.

"Its efficacy is almost the same as the injection," he said. "This gel dries up in half a minute after you apply it. It takes six hours to be absorbed into your body and stays there for 24 hours,"

It should be applied on the back, abdomen or upper arms, where it is unlikely to be brushed by someone else and transferred to that person.

It may cause some skin irritation.

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Androgel, by Besins Healthcare, is available by prescription at urology clinics and GP clinics in Singapore. The monthly treatment cost is \$172 for 30 sachets. Orient Europharma is the distributor in Singapore.

Syndrome not often recognised



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION: SHOOTPHOTO

Testosterone production is closely linked to men's health, according to Dr Jiann Bang-Ping, president of the Taiwanese Association of Andrology.

Testosterone is an important sex hormone for men. It is needed to maintain the male reproductive organs and attributes of manliness such as growth of facial and body hair.

The older a man gets, the more likely his testosterone levels may drop. It starts at about 40 years of age and can decline at a rate of about 1.6 per cent a year.

Dr Jiann gave a presentation on the topic at the Asia Pacific Congress of Urological Diseases 2011 held here two weeks ago. He said: "Testosterone deficiency syndrome is not often recognised and treated."

Sexual dysfunctions such as erectile dysfunction and reduced libido (sex drive) are often the key symptoms presenting for

the condition.

Other symptoms include decreased lean muscle mass, central obesity (around the waist), reduced facial and body hair, fatigue and poor sleep.

In a study of 1,900 men in Taiwan aged 40 and above and with erectile dysfunction, Dr Jiann found more than a third had low testosterone levels.

The study was reported at the Taiwanese Association of Andrology Annual Conference on March 5 and 6.

In his practice, 70 per cent of men choose Androgel, with the rest opting for testosterone injections.

The men reported improved sexual functioning for the three months they were on testosterone therapy.

More than half reported increased night time erections and more than one-third had increased frequency of sexual intercourse.