

Testosterone gel (Tostran 2%) for low sex drive in menopausal women

Gynaecology Department

Information for Patients

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Introduction

This leaflet provides information about use of testosterone gel (**Tostran 2%**) for menopausal women who have a low sex drive (libido). Testosterone is currently not licensed to women in the UK. The use of this gel is 'off label' which means that the manufacturer of the medicine has not applied for a license or has not specified that it can be used in this way. However, it has proven benefits in numerous clinical trials and is also recommended by the British Menopause Society.

What is testosterone?

Testosterone is one of the sex hormones produced naturally from ovaries and adrenal glands in women. It is commonly thought of as a male hormone but testosterone plays an important role in women's life including desire for sex. Around 50% of testosterone is produced by the ovaries and 50% by the adrenal glands. In fact, women produce 3 times more testosterone than oestrogen before the menopause.

Levels of testosterone gradually go down as women get older, but there is a sudden loss of testosterone if you have an operation to remove your ovaries (oophorectomy).

What are the potential benefits of testosterone gel?

Low libido may improve with oestrogen therapy alone, but in some cases testosterone may be more helpful, especially in women who have had their ovaries removed. According to the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines on menopause management, use of testosterone for women who are already taking hormone replacement therapy (HRT) may be helpful. It can sometimes take a few months for the full effects of testosterone to work.

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More research is needed to see if taking testosterone improves, mood, concentration and energy levels.

How is testosterone gel used?

Tostran 2% testosterone gel comes in a canister. Pressing the pump once releases a pea sized amount equal to a 10mg dose which needs to be applied **every other day**.

- **Do not use the amounts stated in the packet's leaflet as this is how much a man should use.**
- The gel should be rubbed onto dry, non-hairy areas such as the inner surface of forearms or thighs.
- The area should be allowed to dry before getting dressed and should not be washed for 2 to 3 hours after applying the gel.
- You should keep changing the area where you apply the gel to avoid hair growth in that area.
- Hands should be washed immediately after applying the gel to your body.
- The area of your skin should not come into contact with partners, children and pregnant women.

What are the side effects?

Clinical studies have shown that if you follow the instructions carefully, most people can use testosterone gel. Possible side effects are:

- increased facial or body hair (hirsutism) - uncommon
- male pattern hair loss (alopecia) which could be patchy or at the front - uncommon
- acne and greasy skin - uncommon
- deepening of voice - rare
- enlarged clitoris - rare

So far clinical studies have not shown an increased risk of heart disease or breast cancer, but more research is needed in this field.

What blood test monitoring will be needed?

Before starting the treatment, blood testing for testosterone is not essential but can be useful. Professionals have not yet agreed on what the 'normal' level of testosterone should be for women.

A measurement of the total testosterone in your blood can be useful to see whether your testosterone levels have gone up, however monitoring changes in your symptoms and side effects may be a better measure of success. Your GP can do these tests at 3 and 6 months on the treatment.

If you find that testosterone is helpful then you would normally continue to use this while you are taking standard HRT. A blood test for testosterone level should then be repeated every 6 months by your GP.

When should testosterone gel not be used?

Testosterone should be avoided:

- during pregnancy or breastfeeding.
- if you have active liver disease.
- if you have a history of hormone sensitive breast cancer.
- if you are a competitive athlete.
- for women with upper normal limits of testosterone levels.

Contact details

You can contact the secretary of your menopause specialist at Leicester Royal Infirmary on 0116 258 6441.

Further information

British Menopause Society:

- <https://thebms.org.uk/publications/tools-for-clinicians/testosterone-replacement-in-menopause/>
- <https://www.womens-health-concern.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/22-WHC-FACTSHEET-Testosterone-for-women-NOV2022-B.pdf>

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