Dear Alice,

I was wondering what is the difference of Hypogonadism and Hypergonadism? What are some symptoms? How can it be resolved, and will it affect one's sex life?

Sincerely,
Just Wondering

Answer

Dear Just Wondering,

Hypogonadism and hypergonadism are syndromes that result from abnormal levels of testosterone and estrogen. They affect the reproductive systems in both sexes, permanently causing the testes and ovaries to not function properly. Hypogonadism acts by lowering the production and quality of testosterone and sperm in men and estrogen and eggs in women. This imbalance in the body’s chemistry can result in a lowered sex drive in both men and women. Hypogonadism can also cause infertility.

Hypogonadism can appear either before or after puberty. If it occurs before puberty, the symptoms can include:

- Lack of menstruation and breast development in girls
- Lessened muscular and beard growth in boys
- Infertility and shortened height in boys and girls

Hypogonadism after puberty can cause:

- Loss of menstruation and sudden onset of hot flashes in women
- Breast enlargement, degeneration of muscle, and loss of beard in men
- Infertility and lack of sexual desire in men and women

Treatment of hypogonadism usually comes through hormone replacement therapy. In men, testosterone is replaced, and in women, estradiol (a precursor to estrogen) and progesterone. While this therapy has improved the chances of many couples trying to have children, it does not help everybody.

On the other end of the spectrum is hypergonadism. As you most likely guessed, those with hypergonadism have higher levels of testosterone and estrogen in their systems. While this
may sound great for the dating scene, the extra hormones are not as fun as they may seem.

Hypergonadism is rarer than hypogonadism. But, like hypogonadism it can appear either before or after puberty.

Hypergonadism occurring before puberty actually prods puberty into action. After puberty those diagnosed exhibit the same affects as the prepubescent. Hypergonadism causes the same changes in both men and women, including:

- Increased acne
- Added musculature
- Unusual growth of body hair
- Sudden mood swings
- Growth in the breasts

Like hypogonadism, hormonal treatments are needed to correct hypergonadism. But since there are higher levels of estrogen and testosterone coursing through the body, a delicately balanced hormonal cocktail is needed. Treating hypergonadism is much more difficult because it is tougher to lower an excess of hormones than it is to add them to the body.

The latest research points towards many different sources as the cause of hypogonadism and hypergonadism in both males and females including:

- Surgery
- Radiation
- Genetic and developmental disorders
- Liver and kidney disease
- Infection
- Certain autoimmune disorders
- Tumors

It appears that the best course of action for treating both hypogonadism and hypergonadism is hormonal therapy. An endocrinologist, a doctor specializing in the body's hormones, can make certain that hormonal balance is achieved in the safest possible way.

Alice!
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