

How Hormones can impact your career

By Elaine Chin, MD, MBA



In less than three years, more than 1 billion women in the world will be experiencing menopause. The same number of men will experience andropause. In Canada, the number will be more than 5 million for each gender - almost 10 million or one-third of our population.

On average, this natural phase of life impacts all people on Earth between the age of 45-55 when hormone levels begin to drop, in particular, estrogen, testosterone, progesterone, and DHEA.

Andropause, often labelled as ‘male menopause’, is misleading because it suggests the symptoms are the result of a sudden drop in testosterone around middle age, similar to what occurs in menopause for women. In contrast, men start to notice a gradual decrease in their dominant hormone, testosterone, around their 40s.

Women will generally experience a dramatic drop in their sex hormones during a 3-to-5-year period, but it can last between seven and 14 years.

Signs and Symptoms of Andropause and Menopause

A man’s testosterone levels decline on average about 1% a year after age 40. Low testosterone levels in older men often go unnoticed. However, women often experience much more acute and severe signs of low sex hormone levels.

Common physical symptoms include:

- Reduced sexual desire and activity
- Breast discomfort or swelling
- Hot flushes or sweats
- Loss of muscle mass and power

Additionally, women can experience:

- Heavy bleeding
- Menstrual cramping
- Fatigue caused by anemia

Longer term, both genders will experience infertility, increased weight gain and body fat, low bone mineral density, and an acceleration of cardiovascular risk.

Non-physical symptoms include:

- Decreased energy
- Depressed mood
- Anxiety
- Poor concentration
- Sleep disturbances

According to the Society for Endocrinology, 1 in 4 women will experience serious menopause symptoms. The average age for menopause is 51, just at the peak of most women’s careers.

Therefore, menopause significantly impacts a woman’s ability to perform and, therefore, impacts their career.

Millions of postmenopausal women enter into management and top leadership roles while suddenly experiencing symptoms such as depression, anxiety, sleep deprivation, and cognitive impairment, to name a few. I believe that menopause is yet another cause for the glass ceiling effect - which is a term for women being unable to reach the higher levels of an organization.

According to the Newson Health Menopause Society,[\[1\]](#) here’s what women said about the impact of their menopause:

- 99% of respondents said their perimenopausal or menopausal symptoms had led to a negative impact on their careers.
- A third called the impact ‘significant.’
- 59% had taken time off work due to their symptoms.
- 18% were off more than 8 weeks.
- Half (50%) of those who took at least 8 weeks off work resigned or took early retirement.

Determining If You Are in Andropause or Menopause

The only way to know if you are experiencing andropause or menopause versus other hormone imbalances is to get tested with a blood or saliva test for bioavailable testosterone, estradiol, progesterone, DHEA, thyroid function, and cortisol.

Managing Andropause and Menopause

We can try to reduce the impact of unwanted symptoms by better managing our lifestyles. This means getting back to basics:

1. Avoid stimulants – cut out caffeine and alcohol to reduce hot flashes, sweat, and poor sleep.
2. Change your diet – reduce overall calories and especially high glycemic carbohydrates to reduce weight gain and increase lean protein to build muscles.
3. Get enough sleep – improve adrenal gland production of cortisol and DHEA into testosterone.
4. Exercise – first with aerobics to get the body fired up, ideally high-intensity interval training (HIIT) followed by light to medium weightlifting.
5. Mediate to support anxiety symptoms.
6. Consider effective doses of some supplements and herbs.
7. Consider the use of hormone replacement therapy.

Some research suggests there are negative side effects for hormone replacement, including a slight increase in heart attack and stroke from clot formation. Testosterone therapy might stimulate the growth of prostate cancer, and estrogen can increase breast cancer risk.

However, we should seriously consider hormone replacement as an important medical tool to manage a phase of life that can impact our physical and mental health negatively.

Get informed about the benefits and risks before you engage in the use of hormones. You must get tested that you are healthy to use this therapy and be monitored with the proper dose.

As with men, women don't talk about many aging issues in their lives. Only 1 in 4 women have discussed their hormonal changes with their doctor.

Unfortunately, 1 in 3 women are incorrectly prescribed antidepressants despite menopause support guidance by the National Institute of Health that states that antidepressants should not be prescribed for menopause-related low mood. [2]

Whether you are in andropause or menopause, do not suffer in silence. You get no medals for it.

There are effective ways to guide you through this very natural phase of your life.

You will also want to manage post-andropause and post-menopause health risks moving forward, proactively.

[1] <https://www.nhmenopausesociety.org/research/impact-of-perimenopause-and-menopause-on-work/#:~:text=99%25%20of%20respondents%20said%20their,off%20more%20than%208%20weeks.>

[2] <https://www.nice.org.uk/news/article/nice-sets-out-further-details-on-menopause-guideline-update>

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