

LIBIDO

FROM PAGE C6

For most women, a natural and gradual decline in testosterone levels begins about 10 years before menopause and may be further reduced if they begin taking estrogen replacement therapy to treat the symptoms of menopause.

However, women of all ages may experience a decrease in their testosterone, which in turn can lead to low libido. Often, certain medications, including birth control pills, childbirth and breast-feeding, stress, an illness or the surgical removal of the ovaries can affect a woman's testosterone levels, explains Nancy Reame, R.N., Ph.D., the U-M study's principal investigator.

"Testosterone is also a female hormone so when it's suppressed, it can definitely have a negative effect on a woman's sexual drive," says Reame, a professor in the U-M School of Nursing and a research scientist in the U-M Reproductive Sciences Program. "Fortunately, for this special group of women where other psychosocial causes have been ruled out,

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Nancy Reame
R.N., Ph.D., University of Michigan

there's been a movement in the medical community to view low sexual libido as a potentially treatable condition."

Some post-menopausal women who use hormone therapy have the option to take a combination estrogen-testosterone pill to help treat their low libido. According to Reame, women using such therapy, in addition to estrogen replacement therapy, have experienced an improvement in their quality of life over and above the effect of using estrogen alone.

Now, the U-M study hopes to find out if another option, a testosterone patch, can bring the same relief to women with low sexual libido. The patch in higher doses has already been used for several years to

bring relief to men experiencing low libido. In both men and women, there has yet to be a consensus on whether low libido is the result of normal aging or a by-product of a disease.

The study, which is placebo controlled, will look closely at post-menopausal women who are currently taking hormones and are in a stable, monogamous sexual relationship. Since libido varies from woman to woman, the study's participants will be asked to keep a journal while using the patch to measure its effectiveness.

In addition, the study will look closely at the side effects and other benefits of testosterone therapy. "Given the recent concerns raised by the finding of large national trials of long-term hormone therapy, we are especially interested in better defining the risks and benefits of short-term menopausal therapies for those women who cannot function without it, but who recognize the need for regular monitoring and re-assessment," says Reame.

To learn more about studies being conducted by the U-M Women's Health Project, call (734) 936-3590.

Chronic conditions affect seniors' feet

'Seniors account for a large percentage of the patients who seek foot and ankle care in our office.'

Dr. Steven Watson
Canton Foot Specialists

By the time seniors reach 65, they have trekked thousands of miles. All that wear and tear on one's feet can lead to foot and ankle problems.

Seniors have unique conditions that come with aging. For example, their skin is more fragile than younger people due to dryness and slower circulation. This can cause cracks and fissures in the skin of the feet and toes. Another common foot problem among this age group is the thinning of the foot pad, which makes it painful to bear weight and walk. Seniors with an immune deficiency may develop fungal nails that can be difficult to treat without professional care.

"Seniors account for a large percentage of the patients who seek foot and ankle care in our office," said Dr. Steven Watson, of Canton Foot Specialists. "We take a special approach to their care, ensuring that they understand the treatment and the course of care they need to follow, especially when it impacts other conditions, such as diabetes or arthritis."

Seniors with diabetes are

when walking.

To improve accessibility of care, Dr. Michael Lefkowitz, of Canton Foot Specialists, makes house calls to seniors who can't readily get to the office. Lefkowitz also provides basic treatment and preventive care for seniors at area assisted living centers, including Waltonwood of Cherry Hill in Canton.

"Seniors should know that there is good treatment available for most foot and ankle conditions," said Lefkowitz.

The use of high-quality orthotics - custom-fit shoe inserts - can add support and comfort for seniors with an off-balance gait. For those with heel pain, padding the sole of the foot or shoe makes walking more comfortable. Neurolysis is an alternative to surgery for treating certain types of corns, calluses and neuromas. Podiatrists first identify the nerve responsible for the condition, then administer a special solution to deactivate the nerve.

For more information about foot care, visit: www.CantonFoot.com.

EATING DISORDERS

FROM PAGE C6

and it becomes very addictive behavior," said Grisham, who is now recovered.

Through EDEN, which plans to offer services to Oakland County in June 2003, Grisham is able to encourage others through her experience. Grisham cited alarming statistics: "Fifty percent of 9-year-old girls have dieted, 80 percent of 10-year-olds, and in high school, 90 percent of women are on diets. And we know dieting is a precursor to eating disorders."

Bingham Farms general medicine practitioner, Dr. Jerry Nosanчук, sees patients with eating disorders. Most of those he sees are "binge-eaters," which refers to people who eat large amounts

of high-fat, high-sugar foods but don't use compensatory actions such as vomiting to rid themselves of the extra calories. Binge-eaters are obese, typically older, and include more men than in the anorexia/bulimia groups.

"True anorexics are very sick people. They look emaciated, (and are) delusional," said Nosanчук. "They will look right at you and tell you they have fat. They are absolutely frightened about gaining weight."

Nosanчук believes a combination of psychiatric, socio-cultural and neuro-hormonal (brain hormones) factors contribute to eating disorders along with cultural factors and personality characteristics. Treatment includes medication and psychiatric treatment depends on a patient's motivation, many lack it.

Nosanчук said he has not had a lot of success with family participation, because sometimes the family is afraid to confront or upset the patient.

"It's a control issue: They're (the patient) in control of their body, they have control of every body. They control the doctor, the family," said Nosanчук. "When you hospitalize them, it's involuntary, but it's an act of compassion ... keeping them alive against their will."

"Eating Disorders Week" is Feb. 23 to March 2. Beaumont Hospital will hold a two-part presentation entitled, "I'm not Dieting, I'm an Anorexic," 7-9 p.m. Monday, Feb. 24, and Wednesday, Feb. 26, to provide information about eating disorders and body image. The programs are free and open to the public. For more information, call (248) 551-7133.

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