Testosterone Replacement Therapy
Information for patients
Testosterone is produced by the testicles and is essential for normal growth and development of the male sex organs and sexual characteristics.

Testosterone is also important for maintaining:

- muscle bulk,
- levels of red blood cells,
- bone density,
- sense of well-being, and
- sexual and reproductive function.

Testosterone is given to men as replacement therapy when natural testosterone levels fall too low.

In testicular cancer, it is rare to have both testicles removed. If this does happen, you’ll be given testosterone replacement therapy straight away. Occasionally, after surgery to remove one testicle, the remaining testicle does not produce enough testosterone by itself. Only men with symptoms of low testosterone should consider replacement therapy.

Symptoms of low testosterone

- Low sex drive (libido)
- Erectile dysfunction
- Fatigue and poor energy levels
- Difficulty concentrating
- Low mood
- Irritability
- Low sense of well-being
- Decrease in body hair.
Types of testosterone supplements

- Intramuscular injections, generally given every few weeks or months.
- Implants, generally under the skin of the lower abdomen and upper thighs.
- Skin patches, applied daily to the arm, buttocks or upper body.
- Gels, applied once a day generally to the shoulder, abdomen or upper arm.

Each of these options provides the correct levels of hormone replacement. There are advantages and disadvantages of each type of hormone replacement therapy. Your doctor will discuss these and their side effects with you to help you make your choice. Testosterone replacement therapy is a widely used therapy and is safe for the most of men who need it. It is safer than if your body is low in testosterone.

General side-effects of testosterone replacement therapy:

- Acne or oily skin
- Breast enlargement
- Mild fluid retention
- Stimulation of prostate tissue
- Worsening of sleep apnoea (a sleep disorder)
- Increase in the number of red cells in the blood

Many of the above side-effects are not common.

Specific side-effects:

- Intramuscular injections can result in fluctuation of sexual desire, mood and energy levels.
- Implants cannot be quickly reversed, can be uncomfortable and visible under the skin. You only need a replacement implant every 3-6 months.
• Skin patches may cause irritation and need replacing each day.  

Testogel is absorbed directly through the skin, is applied daily and dries within 10 minutes. You are advised to cover the application with clothing for two hours after application, to prevent transferring the gel to others by contact.

Long term risks of testosterone therapy

• **Benign prostatic hypertrophy (BPH):** The prostate grows naturally under the stimulation of testosterone. For many men, the prostate grows larger as they age, squeezing the urethra, resulting in difficulty passing urine. BPH can be made worse with testosterone therapy.

• **Prostate cancer:** Testosterone may stimulate prostate cancer to grow. Some experts recommend screening for prostate cancer before starting testosterone therapy. Your doctor will discuss this with you.

• **Sleep apnoea:** This condition can be made worse with testosterone replacement.

• **High blood count:** Testosterone supplements increase the red blood cell count, possibly making the blood ‘thicker’ and perhaps more prone to clotting.

• **Congestive heart failure.**