

Buying testosterone supplements online can be risky

May 7 2013, by Randy Dotinga, Healthday Reporter



Most sellers extol benefits with little mention of potential health hazards, study finds.

(HealthDay)—If you're a man suffering from low energy or libido, the drug industry is eager to help. So-called "Low T"—low testosterone—has become a common catch phrase in TV commercials, and sales of testosterone supplements are on the rise in the United States.

But a new study suggests that many clinics aren't disclosing the risks of testosterone treatment on their websites.

Researchers found that fewer than a third of 70 clinic websites mentioned the side effects of testosterone, although almost all touted potential benefits of treatment like improved sex drive and greater energy. Twenty-one percent, meanwhile, incorrectly denied that

[hormone treatment](#) is linked to significant side effects.

Study co-author Dr. Kevin McVary, chairman of urology at Southern Illinois University School of Medicine, criticized the clinics that failed to be open about the risks of testosterone treatment. "It's unprofessional, and it reeks of [snake oil](#)," he said. "People should beware of using the Internet for medical advice regarding testosterone."

Testosterone, which is mainly produced in the testicles, is considered the [male hormone](#) (although it does occur in smaller quantities in women). [Testosterone levels](#) dip as men grow older. According to the Urology Care Foundation, researchers have found that about 20 percent of men over the age of 60 have low testosterone, which can lead to low libido, weak erections and fatigue.

Testosterone supplements are now available in a variety of forms, including injections, patches and gels that patients rub into the skin. The cost can run from \$75 to \$300 a month, said Dr. John Amory, a professor of medicine at the University of Washington in Seattle.

While [testosterone treatment](#) can indeed be beneficial, the side effects can include lower levels of healthy [HDL cholesterol](#), increased male pattern baldness and possible harm to prostate health, Amory said.

Oral testosterone can lead to [liver problems](#), study co-author McVary said, and testosterone overuse—such as by some bodybuilders—can lead to rage, acne, congestive heart failure and worsening of urinary symptoms.

In the new study, the researchers looked at the websites of 70 providers of testosterone supplements in Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, New York City and Philadelphia. One-third were run by people who weren't physicians.

Only 27 percent described side effects of testosterone supplements, while 95 percent touted benefits. About a third of the sites run by urologists or endocrinologists described male breast growth as a potential risk. Seven percent of all the sites, however, denied breast growth as a potential side effect.

Amory said the new research appears to be valid and reflects "my impression of the way in which this [testosterone] is being oversold to patients."

McVary and Amory said they don't know if the clinics are acting legally when they omit information about [testosterone](#) risks. However, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration requires drug companies to describe the risks of prescription medications in their ads.

What to do? When it comes to medical information on the Internet, McVary said, "only go to legitimate sites that are sponsored by a medical organization that is known to you."

The findings were scheduled to be released Tuesday at the American Urological Association annual meeting in San Diego. The data and conclusions should be viewed as preliminary until published in a peer-reviewed journal.

More information: For more about [testosterone](#), try the U.S. National Library of Medicine.

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