

Testosterone gel (Tostran 2%) for low sex drive in menopausal and post-menopausal women

Information for Patients

Introduction

This leaflet provides information about use of testosterone gel Tostran 2%, for menopausal and post-menopausal women who have a low sex drive (libido). Testosterone is currently not licensed to women in the UK. The use of this gel is 'off label' which means that the manufacturer of the medicine has not applied for a license or has not specified that it can be used in this way. However, it has proven benefits in clinical trials and is also recommended by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE).

What is testosterone?

Testosterone is one of the sex hormones produced naturally from ovaries and adrenal glands in women. It is commonly thought of as a male hormone, but testosterone plays an important role in a women's life including desire for sex. Levels of testosterone gradually go down as women get older, but there is a sudden loss of testosterone if you have an operation to remove your ovaries (oophorectomy). When a woman's level of testosterone decreases, she may find that she desires sex less often. There is some evidence that having lower testosterone levels can also affect your mood and increase your risk of being depressed.

What are the potential benefits of testosterone gel?

Testosterone may improve libido, mood, energy, and concentration. Low libido may improve with oestrogen therapy alone, but in some cases testosterone may be more helpful, especially in women who have had their ovaries removed. According to the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines on menopause management, use of testosterone for women who are already taking hormone replacement therapy (HRT) may be helpful. It can sometimes take a few months for the full effects of testosterone to work.

How is testosterone gel used?

Tostran 2% testosterone gel comes in a canister. Pressing the pump once releases a pea sized amount equal to a 10mg dose which needs to be applied initially twice a week but may be increased to every other day by your doctor.

The gel should be rubbed onto dry, non-hairy areas such as the inner surface of forearms or thighs.

The area should be allowed to dry before getting dressed and should not be washed for 2 to 3 hours after applying the gel.

You should keep changing the area where you apply the gel to avoid hair growth in that area.

Hands should be washed immediately after applying the gel to the body.

The area of your skin should not come into contact with partners, children and pregnant women within 1 hour of application.

Do NOT use the amounts stated in the packet's leaflet as this is how much a man should use.

What are the side effects?

Clinical studies have shown that if you follow the instructions carefully, most people can benefit from testosterone gel. Possible side effects are:

- increased facial or body hair (hirsutism) – uncommon
- male pattern hair loss (alopecia) which could be patchy or at the front – uncommon
- acne and greasy skin – uncommon
- deepening of voice – rare
- enlarged clitoris - rare

So far clinical studies have not shown an increased risk of heart disease or breast cancer, but more research is required in this field.

Is blood test monitoring required?

Blood tests are not able to diagnose whether or not you need testosterone but are used as a safety check to ensure you are not getting too much on top of your own natural levels. Blood tests will be carried out before starting, and repeated after 3 months on treatment then 6 monthly. If you find that testosterone is helpful then you would normally continue to use this while you are taking the standard HRT.

When should testosterone gel not be used?

Testosterone should be avoided:

- during pregnancy or breastfeeding
- if you have active liver disease
- if you have a history of hormone sensitive breast cancer
- if you are a competitive athlete
- for women with upper normal limits or high baseline free testosterone levels /Free Androgen Index (>5%)

Further Information

The British Menopause Society: www.thebms.org.uk

Women's Health Concern: www.womens-health-concern.org

Menopause Matters: www.menopausematters.co.uk