



# A USER'S GUIDE

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WHAT EVERY MAN  
NEEDS TO KNOW



**ANDROLOGY AUSTRALIA**  
What every man needs to know

# 1. Why men need to know more

Good health is vital for a happy and full life. But, with work and family responsibilities, men often overlook their own health and general health checks aren't always a priority for them.

Male sexual health is an important part of general health. The male reproductive system plays a key role in many areas of well-being. Knowing more about your body, how it works, and what diseases can affect you is the first step to a healthier life.

# 2. How it all works

The **male reproductive system** is made up of the testes, a system of ducts (tubes) and other glands that open into the ducts. The brain plays an important part in the control of the male reproductive system. The **pituitary gland** and the **hypothalamus**, located at the base of the brain, control the production of male hormones and sperm. Luteinizing hormone (LH) and follicle stimulating hormone (FSH) are the two important messenger hormones made by the pituitary gland that act on the testes.

**The testes** (testis: singular) are a pair of egg-shaped glands that sit in the scrotum next to the base of the penis on the outside of the body. The testes make sperm and the male sex hormone **testosterone**. About 70 million **sperm** are made every day and it takes about 70 days for sperm to become mature and able to fertilise an egg.

When released from the testes, the sperm spend two to 10 days passing through the **epididymis**, a highly coiled tube (nearly five metres long) that lies at the back of each testis. At orgasm (sexual climax), waves of muscle contractions transport the sperm, with a small amount of fluid, from the epididymis through the **vas deferens**, a tube joined to each testis, and then to the **ejaculatory ducts** in the **prostate gland**. The prostate is about the size of a walnut and sits underneath the bladder. The main role of the prostate is to make fluid that protects and feeds sperm. The prostate makes about one third, and the **seminal vesicles** contribute more than half, of the fluid (**semen**) that is ejaculated (released) from the penis at orgasm.

The ejaculatory ducts join the **urethra**, a tube that runs from the bladder to the end of the penis. The urethra carries both urine and semen out of the body.

**Testosterone** is the most important androgen (male sex hormone) in men and it is needed for normal reproductive and sexual function. Testosterone is important for the physical changes that happen during male puberty, such as development of the penis and testes, and for the features typical of adult men such as facial and body hair. Testosterone also acts on cells in the testes to make sperm. Testosterone is also important for overall good health. It helps the growth of bones and muscles, and it affects mood, libido (sex drive) and certain aspects of mental ability.

### 3. What can go wrong

Like any other part of the human body, things can sometimes go wrong with the male reproductive system. When they do, it's important to see a doctor quickly. With most problems, getting help early on can avoid serious long-term problems.

Here are some of the most common problems that men may face:

## 4. How to find out more

The most important step is to see your doctor.

However, if you would like more information about any of these problems or to find out more about male reproductive health, visit the Andrology Australia website ([www.andrologyaustralia.org](http://www.andrologyaustralia.org)) or call 1300 303 878.

## Infertility

Often, men are shocked to be told that problems in having a baby are because of them. But, in fact, about one in twenty men in Australia is infertile.

Male infertility can have many causes, but problems with the number or quality of sperm are the most common. Often doctors can't find a reason for sperm not being made properly, which can make coping with male infertility difficult. Some infertility problems can be treated by fertility specialists, and should be talked over with a doctor before thinking about donor sperm, adoption or foster parenting.

## Prostate enlargement

Most common in older men, about one in seven Australian men over 40 years of age have problems with their prostate.

The most common prostate disease is a non-cancerous enlargement of the prostate called benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH). While not usually life-threatening, for some men BPH can have a major effect on quality of life because of problems with urination (going to the toilet).

Medicines, and sometimes surgery, can help the symptoms of prostate disease. However, not all urination problems are caused by the prostate, so it's important to see your doctor to find the cause.



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## Prostate cancer

About 20,000 Australian men every year are told they have prostate cancer. Prostate cancer often happens with no symptoms, so as men get older they may want to talk to their doctor about testing for prostate cancer by digital rectal examination (DRE) and the prostate specific antigen (PSA) test.

There is much debate about the PSA test so talk it over with a doctor to make sure you understand all the benefits and risks of testing.

Early prostate cancer can be treated with surgery, radiation therapy or active surveillance.

## Erectile dysfunction

Sexual problems in men are more common than you might think. About one in five Australian men over the age of 40 have problems getting or keeping an erection (erectile dysfunction or impotence). In some cases, erectile dysfunction is a sign of a serious health problem such as diabetes or heart disease.

There are many treatments for erectile dysfunction, including medicines, but talking to your partner and your doctor is the most important first step. Even if the cause of erectile dysfunction is a physical one, getting some counselling or emotional support is an important part of treatment.



## Androgen (testosterone) deficiency

Lower energy levels, mood swings, bad temper (irritability), poor concentration, reduced muscle strength or a lack of interest in sex may be a sign of androgen deficiency (low testosterone levels). About one in 200 men in Australia has androgen deficiency, but not all are diagnosed.

Androgen (or testosterone) deficiency affects men of all ages and can be caused by a genetic or medical problem, by damage to the testes, or it can be a part of ageing. In some older men, testosterone levels fall to a point that treatment is needed.

Androgen deficiency can only be diagnosed by a doctor. Testosterone treatment can be given by a doctor in the form of injections, capsules, lotions, patches or gels.

## Testicular cancer

Testicular cancer is the second most common cancer in men aged from 18 to 39, with about 700 Australian men diagnosed each year. But it's easy to treat and more than 95 per cent of men are cured.

A hard, painless lump in the testis is the most common symptom, but the testis may also feel painful and tender. In a few men, constant backache, coughing or breathlessness, and enlarged or tender nipples can mean the cancer has spread to other parts of the body. Surgical removal of the cancerous testis is the first treatment for all testicular cancer. This surgery doesn't affect sexual performance or being able to get an erection.

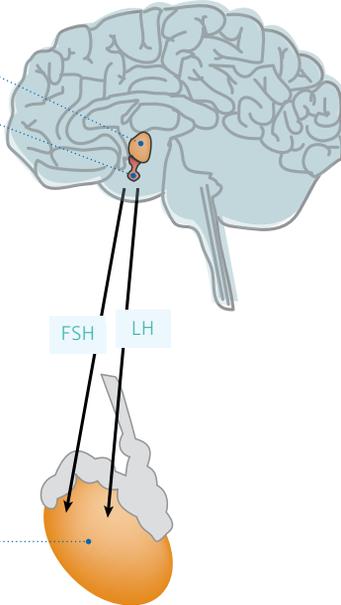


## HOW THE BRAIN TRIGGERS HORMONE PRODUCTION

Hypothalamus

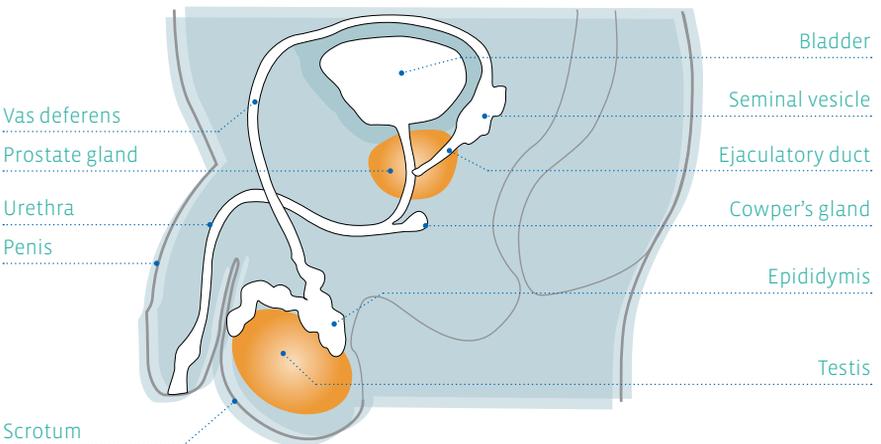
Pituitary

Two hormones from the pituitary—Luteinising Hormone (LH) and Follicle Stimulating Hormone (FSH)—act on the testis to stimulate production of testosterone and sperm



Testis

## ANATOMY OF THE MALE REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM





Andrology is the study of the functions and diseases specific to males, especially of the reproductive organs. It is equivalent to gynaecology in women.

Andrology Australia is the centre for male reproductive health, funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and administered by Monash University.

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