Andropause (Male Menopause): What Is This Crazy Thing We’re Going Through?

“Can you imagine me with a woman old enough to be my wife? No really. I’m serious. Can you imagine me walking into Spago with a 70-year-old woman? Forget it. I don’t have that spirit. My girlfriend is 25 years old – perfect.”

– Tony Curtis, age 70

Jed Diamond
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The year I was born, my father was 38 year’s old. He was going through what was then called a mid-life crisis. What I remember about those early years were his frequent absences. He always seemed restless and would take weekend trips looking for work which would often last for weeks. His career as an actor and writer was stalled and my mother had gone to work to bring in more money. I could tell it was a source of shame for him that he couldn’t get work which would allow him to be a man in his own eyes and in the eyes of his wife.

During one of his trips I overheard a conversation between my mother and her women friends that had a profound impact on my life. They were talking about their husbands, all of whom didn’t seem to be living up to some measure of success that would make them acceptable in the eyes of their wives. I heard my mother say, “He’s either gone when I need him or he’s always under foot. Of the two I’d rather he were gone. When he’s here he’s always moping around the house.”

What I remember more than the words was the tone in the women’s voices. It was a mixture of pity, contempt, and ridicule. As a four year-old I made vow to myself. I would never let women talk about me like they had talked about my father. I would rather die first. That oath translated in later years into a commitment that I would never be out of work, that I would do anything to be sure my family had money, and that I would in fact be willing to die rather than break my commitment.

In later years I realized that my father was operating with similar beliefs. When I was nearly 40 I came across a journal that my father had left. I found a number of entries that were dated around the time he was going through his own male menopause passage, though there was no name for it at the time.

June 4th:

“Your flesh crawls, your scalp wrinkles when you look around and see good writers, established writers, writers with credits a block long, unable to sell, unable to find work, yes, it’s enough to make anyone, blanch, turn pale and sicken.”

August 15th:

“Faster, faster, faster, I walk. I plug away looking for work, anything to support my family. I try, try, try, try, try. I always try and never stop.”

November 8th:

“A hundred failures, an endless number of failures, until now, my confidence, my hope, my belief in myself, has run completely out. Middle aged, I stand and gaze ahead, numb, confused, and desperately worried. All around me I see the young in spirit, the young in heart, with ten times my confidence, twice my youth, ten times my fervor, twice my education. I see them all, a whole army of them, battering at the same doors I’m battering, trying in the same field I’m trying. Yes, on a Sunday morning in early November, my hope and my life stream are both
running desperately low, so low, so stagnant, that I hold my breath in fear, believing that the dark, blank curtain is about to descend.”

As a mid-life man myself I can feel my father’s pain as his self esteem slowly eroded away, the fear and frustration of trying to support a family took its toll, and the tide of shame began to envelope him.

Six days after his November 8th entry, my father tried to kill himself. Though he survived physically, emotionally he was never again the same. Over the last thirty-five years I’ve treated more and more men who are facing similar stresses to those my father experienced. The economic conditions and social dislocations that contributed to his feelings of shame and hopelessness continue to weigh heavily on men today. I’ve come to see that this transition period, I call male menopause, is critical to men’s survival and how they will live the second half of their lives.

Luckily my father survived, but his depression deepened and he was eventually hospitalized. He and my mother divorced and things were never the same. In some ways my whole life has been dedicated to understanding why he left and why so many other men leave at this time of life—through divorce, disease, despair, or death.

My father and I reconnected in the last 10 years of his life. He lived to be 90. He loved baseball and used it as a metaphor for life. He said, you have to keep coming up to the plate no matter how many times you strike out and you only win by getting around all three bases and making it home.

If second base is mid-life, I believe we are losing our males at three places along the base paths of life. Too many young men never make it to first. What they see early on in their lives convinces them that there is little hope. Their philosophy seems to be “live fast, die young.” They end up in prison, on drugs, or dead on the streets.

Other men are afraid of getting old. They become obsessed with youth and beauty. These are the guys who won’t accept that aging is a necessary reality and want to stay “forever young.” They think they will find happiness by leaving their partners for someone younger and prettier. They are afraid to make the turn towards home, run past second base and end up alone in left field.

A third group makes the turn at second, but sees the later years as times of increasing loss. They believe all their worthwhile years are in the past. They expect to deteriorate, to get old and sick. I see them going past third and ending up dead in the dug-out.

The key to success, as my father said, was to make it around all three bases and get home safely. Perhaps then to become a coach and help others make the journey successfully.

Male Menopause (Andropause) is the stage of life that prepares a man to move from the first half to the second. Just as adolescence is a transition period and ideally prepares a child to become an adult, male menopause helps men to move from first adulthood to second adulthood. For those who
have the courage to make the journey, the second half can be even more fulfilling than the first. However, I see too many men who get lost at this stage of life. Women have a specific biological marker that tells them they are moving into a new stage of life. For men, the change is less clear and often more troublesome. We are really 20 years behind in our study of Andropause than we are in studying menopause. Medical experts are just now beginning to recognize the reality of male menopause.

What Are the Medical Experts Saying About Male Menopause (Andropause)?

- Dr. Ronald Klatz, President of the American Academy of Anti-aging Medicine says, “One of the best kept secrets is that men go through a male form of menopause called Andropause.
- Marc Blackman, M.D., chief of endocrinology and metabolism at Johns Hopkins Bayview Medical Center says, “The male menopause is a real phenomenon and it does similar things to men as menopause does to women, although less commonly and to a lesser extent.”
- Theresa Crenshaw, M.D. author of The Alchemy of Love and Lust says, “In the case of male menopause, we are still in the Dark Ages. Men have fewer guideposts to help them today than women had a generation ago. Only recently have we begun to understand the biochemistry of these events, tilting the scales toward a physiological explanation.”
- Aubrey M. Hill, M.D., author of Viropause/Andropause, The Male Menopause says, “My experience has now convinced me that most men undergo what could be called male menopause and that many men suffer acutely and needlessly.”
- Malcolm Carruthers, M.D., author of Maximising Manhood says, “Andropause is a critical health concern for men and the women who love them. It’s often insidious onset can be at anytime from the age of 30 onwards, though typically it is in the fifties. One of the reasons it’s often missed is that it is usually more gradual in onset than the menopause in the female, although it is more severe in its long-term consequences. It is a crisis of vitality just as much as virility, even though its most obvious sign is loss both of interest in sex and of erectile power.”
- The majority of participants at the 2nd World Congress on the Aging Male which was held in Geneva, Switzerland in February, 2000 believed that Andropause was an important life transition for men. I was one of over 800 researchers, scientists, and clinicians representing over 50 countries world-wide attending the Congress. When asked whether they thought there was a significant hormonal aspect to Andropause, over 80% said they did and would prescribe testosterone or other hormones for men who needed them.
- Jonathan V. Wright, M.D. and Lane Lenard, Ph.D., authors of Maximize Your Vitality & Potency say, “Although the ideas has been around in one form or other for thousands of years, until very recently the existence of a hormonally driven male menopause analogous to that experienced by women was widely denied by the forces that rule mainstream medicine. Officially in this country, it still does not exist, although incontrovertible scientific evidence to the contrary has finally begun a slow shift in attitude.”
Male Menopause or Andropause: What’s In A Name?

The term “male menopause” is obviously inaccurate. The term “menopause” was introduced by French doctors in the 1870s, combining two Greek words—menses (“periods”) and pausis (“stop”). Men don’t have a period, so they don’t stop having one. I chose to use male menopause when I wrote my books on the subject because I found there were so many similarities between what women and men experience. The major difference is that men can continue having children following this change of life, where women’s reproductive life ends. There have been a number of names which have been used to describe this important life transition: male menopause, Andropause, viropause, the male climacteric, penopause, and andropenia. All indicate that there is a change or ending that occurs in male functioning. Increasingly I am using the term Andropause (andro from the Greek word meaning “male” and pausis from the word meaning “stop.”)

The name indicates there is an ending of a certain aspect of maleness, which I’ll describe in more detail later, and the beginning of a new stage. It also focuses on the fact that there is a drop in male hormones, particularly the androgens (andro, “male” and gen “to give), like testosterone at this time of life.

Do Men Experience Hormonal Cycles?

Lowered levels of hormones at mid-life are central to the changes associated with Andropause. Testosterone is one of the significant hormones that decreases as men age, but there are testosterone cycles that occur throughout a man’s life. We now know that men, like women, experience complex hormonal rhythms that affect their sexuality, mood, and temperament. For instance, researchers have found 5 different testosterone cycles in men:

• Rhythmic fluctuations three to four times an hour. (Could this account for research that shows that men think about sex every 15 minutes?)
• Daily changes with testosterone higher in the morning and lower in the afternoon.
• Fluctuations throughout the year with levels higher in October and lower in April.
• Decreasing levels associated with Andropause that occur as men get older.
• Monthly fluctuations that are rhythmic, but different for each man.

“The morning highs, daily fluctuations, and seasonal cycles whip men around,” says Dr. Theresa Crenshaw, author of The Alchemy of Love and Lust. “Think about the moment-to-moment impact of testosterone levels firing and spiking all over the place during the day, and what this must be doing to a man’s temperament.”

Is Andropause The Result of Men’s Loss of Testosterone As We Age?

Some clinicians and researchers believe that Andropause is primarily the result of our loss of testosterone. It’s clear to me that it is much more than that. Andropause is a multi-dimensional
change of life with hormonal, physical, psychological, interpersonal, social, sexual, and spiritual aspects. All aspects are equally important and all must be understood and treated. They are all present with men during this period of time, though they may not all be of equal intensity or equally obvious.

**Andropause and Adolescence: Similar Life Stages?**

I often describe Andropause as adolescence the second time around or as puberty in reverse. During puberty male hormones such as testosterone surge mightily. We’ve all experienced the signs. As Michael Gurian, author of The Wonder of Boys says, “When a boy hits puberty, the influence of testosterone on the brain increases manifold. His testosterone level itself will increase in quantities ten to twenty times more than girls. His genitals will increase to eight times their previous size. His body will process anywhere between five to seven surges of testosterone per day. You can expect him to masturbate continually, bump into things a lot, be moody and aggressive, require a great deal of sleep, lose his temper, want sex as soon as he gets up the emotional guts to propose to a partner, and have a massive sexual fantasy life.”

Do any of these changes sound familiar to you? Think about what we’re seeing at this time of life:

- Mood swings.
- Hormonal shifts
- Confusion about sexuality
- Desire to break away from family and at the same time clinging tightly to family for support
- Obsession with the latest toys and gadgets
- Need for intimacy and fears of getting close
- Physical changes in the body
- Questions about identity and direction in life

I think we all recognize these signs. But are we looking at a fifteen year-old or a fifty year-old? Re-title Gurian’s book in your mind and call it The Wonder of Mid-life Men and think about our dropping testosterone. Do any of the changes feel familiar?

**Action Option:**

Think back at some of your own changes when you were going through puberty. Which were the most upsetting? Which were the most difficult? Now think about the changes you may have experienced going through Andropause. Do you see any similarities? Are there any changes you would like to make about how you go through this change of life?

The similarity between adolescence and Andropause is one of the reasons that mid-life parents have such a difficult time dealing with their teen-age kids. They are both working through the same issues. When Dad freaks out thinking about his daughter’s emerging sexuality, it is often because he is also dealing with changes in his own sexuality. When father has difficulty

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*Andropause (Male Menopause)*

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setting reasonable limits on his son’s behavior, it is often because he is having trouble setting limits for himself.

**What Are the Signs We Are Moving Into The Andropause?**

The most common signs of Andropause include the following:

1. Reduced libido or sex drive
2. Reduced potency or ability to obtain and maintain an erection
3. Fatigue or loss of vitality
4. Irritability and “grumpiness”
5. Aches, pains, and stiffness
6. Depression which often manifests as anger or boredom
7. Night sweats or “hot flashes”
8. Dryness and thinning of the skin
9. Restlessness and longing to “break free”
10. Weight gain, acquiring a “pot belly”

**Andropause From the Inside: One Man’s Story**

Over the years I have worked with thousands of men going through Andropause. Jake’s story is unique only in his ability to articulate his feelings more easily than most of us.

Jake is a 45 year-old man. He is married, the father of four grown children. He has been a truck driver for most of his adult life. He came to me because his marriage was in trouble as a result of an affair he had. But as we talked, it became clear that the underlying problems had to do with the changes associated with Andropause.

“That’s where these last few years or so of my life come into focus,” he told me. “Or should I say into blur?” He went on to describe what had been going on with him. There was a change in my thoughts. My feelings about myself and about my sexuality began to change. I didn’t notice it as a change at the time but I notice it now as I look back. And even now I probably wouldn’t have noticed it if my wife hadn’t pointed things out.

Some of the changes were fundamental. I remember hearing people talk about depression for instance—my sister, my wife, people on T.V. I heard stories of how it would push them into committing desperate acts. It had always been this distant, abstract idea of a thing that I could not understand.

When I had problems, I’d just say to myself, “It’s all in your head. Just get it out of there.” What in the world could anyone get so down about that they could actually take their own life? Or how could they yell at their wives, leave their families, lose their passion for life, look for a younger woman, or do many of the other things that people do when they are depressed? I can honestly say I didn’t have two minutes of depression in my entire life until three years ago. I can now understand what depression really is. Not since I was a child did I feel such a deep
seated anger and sadness. I would yell and I would cry. I couldn’t believe it was me. Here I was, a 45 year-old grown man, a truck driver, for heavens sakes, throwing a tantrum like a 4-year-old or bawling like a baby.

Looking back now I can see that the depression preceded the affair by two years, though at the time I didn’t feel depressed. It felt more like everyone else went out of their way to irritate me. I loved my wife, but the passion seemed to be draining out of our relationship. I didn’t realize it was really the passion draining out of me.

My thinking began to change. I told myself I wasn’t getting enough of what I needed, but I didn’t know how to ask for what was important to me. I felt like my manhood was slipping away and I didn’t know what to do.

That was when I started noticing the 28 year-old waitress who began to work at one of the restaurants I often stopped at when I was on the road. She was interested in me. She found me attractive. I felt complimented. I felt wanted. At that time my wife and I had just come through some hard times and now had two of our grown children living us. I think I carried some bitterness towards her and my kids for a situation that I didn’t seem to have any control over. It’s awful to feel powerless over a situation.

I sure felt like it would be so wonderful to get out from under all these responsibilities. With the young women I met I felt young and capable and powerful again. I think I knew my wife still loved me and wanted me, but there was so much baggage.

Or maybe it was the bitterness, a form of discontent caused by unresolved anger and doubt. So I had a chance for something that I thought I would never have a chance at again. How many guys pushing 50 would in their wildest dreams have a girl that young and attractive come after them?

I took it. I know now that I absolutely should not have. What a high price to pay, to risk the loss of my marriage, for such a short lived pleasure. But it ended as quickly as it started. And the truth is I honestly did love my wife. We both tried to forget about the affair and get on with our lives. “Let the past stay frozen where it is and make the present flow,” I thought. It seemed that things returned to normal and my wife and I we were getting along fine.

Yet I still felt a deep discontent. The depression came back, light gage at first, but got worse as time went on. I started having a hard time with details. I was working on remodeling the attic and couldn’t seem to do the job right. I was impatient and wouldn’t take the time to read the directions and do the measurements correctly. It just became too much for me. The project still remains, to this day, unfinished. It was just one more thing that wasn’t like me. I’d always considered myself somewhat of a perfectionist and prided myself on my ability to complete things ahead of schedule. I just felt like I had to escape.

It also bled into other aspects of my emotional life. Did I say emotional life? I wasn’t even sure I had an emotional life. Things were either good or bad and why bother thinking about anything bad?

Andropause (Male Menopause)
Everything is just fine, I would tell myself. Things will always take care of themselves, and if for some reason they don’t, then I’ll handle it then. Who cares? Well I wish I still had that positive attitude and confidence. My wife calls it cockiness. I seem to have lost that somehow. It has been replaced by worry, unsureness, and doubt.

That was another thing I found that drew me to the younger woman. She gave me a renewed sense of power, a clear sense of direction. She made me feel strong and important. I felt important. We were important to each other. I felt needed again. She often made the comment, “We’re so good together.” That’s something that over time seems to get unintentionally swept under the carpet with your spouse.

With my spouse I often felt awkward, like two teenagers who don’t know how to kiss and bump noses and arms. I felt like we were walking on eggshells, afraid to make the wrong move. I felt like I couldn’t do anything right, that as a man I was a complete klutz, if not a failure. I never felt that with the younger woman.

I never knew that depression in men often expresses itself in anger. That was certainly the case with me. I was often irritated and grouchy and sometimes would have angry outbursts over the least little thing. That is so totally unlike me, I tended to blame it on my wife. I’ve always had an easy going, calm, and happy personality.

One of the most difficult aspects of this time of life is the uncertainty. I question everything. I have faith in nothing. Even though I hate the way I feel, I can’t seem to help it.

To make a long story short, my wife’s detective work and my sloppy sneaking around brought my three month affair to an end.

There is one thing I would like to say to others, one bit of advice that is totally out of a man’s control, which is the way one’s wife handles the crisis. In my case I was as fortunate as I could possibly be in this.

I can see things in my wife now that I have been blind to for the past 14 years. It’s amazing to me that I could close my eyes and refuse to see the obvious for so long. In the end, some years from now, whichever way this story goes, I will never doubt that my wife really loved me. She has dealt with her deep heartache without making me feel even worse than I do.

She has tried in every way possible to help me get through this mysterious emotional passage. I know now how devastating my affair was to my wife and to our marriage. When a marriage suffers such a potentially deadly blow, and when the one who took that blow turns their attention to healing of their attacker, I think it can only be real love at work.

After more than a year in therapy it looks like Jake and his wife Linda are on a positive path. Although there is still a lot of healing that needs to occur before full trust will be restored, the couple is committed to each other and to making the marriage work. They both acknowledge that this is has been the most difficult time of their lives, but feel they are on the way to the life that they both have wanted. Both feel very thankful that they stayed together during these tough times.

Andropause (Male Menopause)
At What Age Does Andropause Begin?

Andropause generally begins between the ages of 40 and 55. However, for some men it can begin as early as 30 or as late as 65. I recommend that men begin having their levels of testosterone checked in their 30s, before they experience any signs. It is more important to know how our testosterone levels change through the years than to know our absolute level.

How Long Does Andropause Last?

Andropause generally takes 5 to 15 years to complete. How long it takes depends on many factors. Remember, this is not simply a psychological shift from one stage of life to another, but involves all seven dimensions. We don’t go from adolescence to adulthood overnight. The change from first adulthood to second adulthood generally takes as long or longer than moving through puberty.

It also depends on how tightly we cling to first adulthood. Many men have a fanatical desire to stay forever young. They associate becoming older with becoming frail, sexless, and lifeless. The more we cling to the past the longer it takes to embrace the future. The journey is inevitable. We can no more resist Andropause than we can resist puberty. We can fight it, but we can’t avoid it. Inevitably we must move through it to the other side.

How Many Men Are Going Through the Andropause Passage?

- In the U.S. there are 25,172,000 men between the ages of 40 and 55 who are now going through the Andropause Passage.
- In less than 25 years, by 2020, the number of men in the U.S. going through the Andropause Passage will grow to approximately 57,500,000.
- World-wide there are approximately 408 million men between the ages of 40 and 55 who are going through the Andropause Passage.
- By the year 2020 the number will grow to approximately 690 million men.

Why Haven’t We Heard More About Andropause?

Men respond to their life changes in a way that reflects our culturally acquired self image. We deny them. For us, going through this time of life is frightening. We may already feel like we are losing it, that our manhood is deserting us. Admitting that these changes may be hormonal as much as psychological may raise more fears.

This denial extends to the largely male scientific and medical communities and accounts for why it has taken so long to study Andropause in more depth. We, who are out of touch with their body rhythms, afraid that “cycles” are feminine and hence to be avoided at all costs, are unlikely to be aware of the whisperings within until they get very loud.
What Is the Purpose of Andropause?

The purpose of the Andropause is to signal the end of the first part of a man’s life and prepare him for the second half. Male Menopause is not the beginning of the end, as many fear, but the end of the beginning. It is the passage to the most passionate, powerful, productive, and purposeful time of a man’s life.

I often think of life as climbing up a mountain. At some point we reach our highest level and begin coming down the other side. It’s not surprising that we are frightened of the changes associated with the down-side of the mountain. For most of human history we died when we reached the bottom. As late as the turn of the century the average life-span was only 47 years. Those of us who reach 50 can expect to live another 30 years. Many of us will live to be 100 or more.

There is a second mountain for us to climb, one that allows us to be more relaxed and less driven, more playful and less serious, more accepting and less demanding of ourselves and others. However, in order to get to this second mountain, we must go through the Andropause valley. We can’t jump from peak to peak.

But in order to be successful on this second mountain we have to recognize that it is quite different than the first. One of the most startling, and disconcerting, aspects of this shift is that our whole sense of manhood changes. It’s as though the polarities of life had suddenly reversed themselves. It is a time to create a new definition of what it means to be a man, a challenge that is confounding to many of us.