



# A USER'S GUIDE

WHAT EVERY MAN NEEDS TO KNOW

# 1. Why men need to know more

Good health is a vital factor in a happy, fulfilling life. But, sadly, most men don't look after themselves very well. For example, women aged 25 to 34 are twice as likely to visit a doctor than men of the same age\*. Yet, given shorter life expectancies and greater health risks, the need for men to be more aware of health issues is vital.

Male sexual health is of particular importance. The normal functioning of 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 it is the first step towards a healthier life.

\*Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Australia's Health 2002

# 2. How it all works

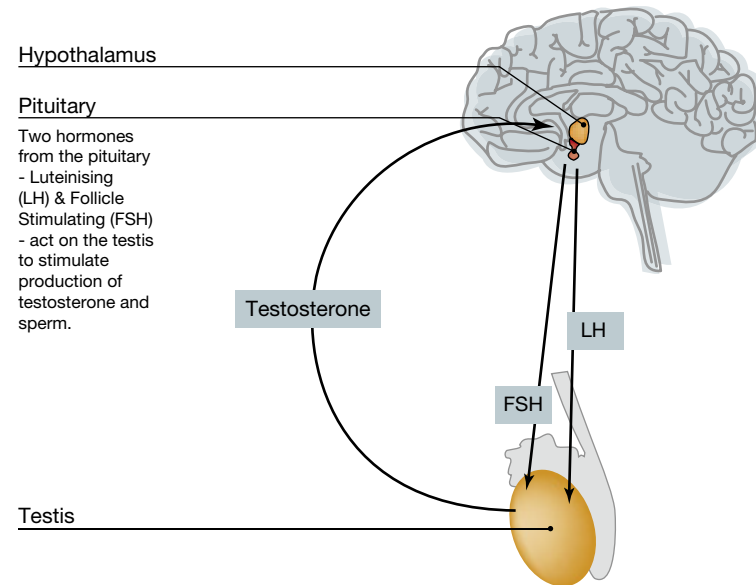
The brain plays an important part in the male reproductive system. The **hypothalamus** and **pituitary gland** both sit at the base of the brain and, in combination, are responsible for stimulating production of both sperm and the male sex hormone testosterone by the testicles.

The **penis** has three functions: passing semen, passing urine and giving sexual pleasure.

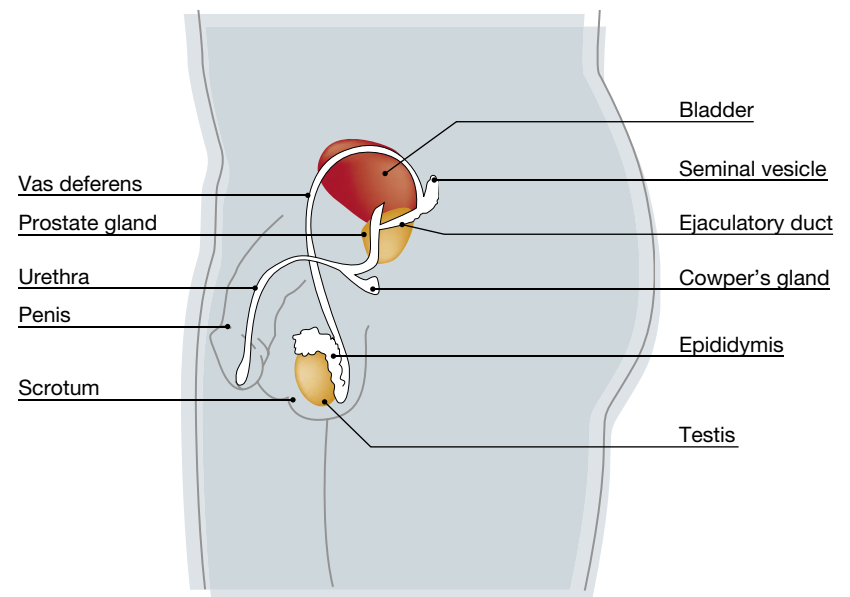
The **testicles** (or **testes**) are two glands that hang behind the penis in a bag of skin called the scrotum. These produce sperm (about 70 million every day, right into old age) and testosterone. Each sperm takes about 70 days to develop, and then moves into the **epididymis**, a coiled tube (nearly five metres long!) that is coiled up over the back of each testicle. Here the sperm continue to mature for about ten days.

The sperm then move from the epididymis into tubes called the **vas deferens**, one connected to each testicle. These transport the sperm to the **ejaculatory ducts** in the **prostate gland**. The prostate sits below the bladder, is about the size of a walnut and produces a fluid that protects and enriches sperm. It makes up about 30% of the fluid volume of semen. The **seminal vesicles** also produce an energy-rich fluid that contributes about 60% of the semen. The ejaculatory ducts join the **urethra**, a single tube that connects the bladder to the tip of the penis. It carries both urine and semen out of the body.

## HOW THE BRAIN TRIGGERS HORMONE PRODUCTION



## ANATOMY OF THE MALE REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM



### 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, quick intervention can avoid serious long-term consequences.

Here are some of the most common disorders men may experience:

#### Infertility

Frequently, men are shocked to discover that difficulties in having a baby are due to problems on their part. **But, in fact, it's estimated that one in twenty men in Australia are infertile.**

Male infertility can have many causes, but problems with the quantity or quality of sperm produced are among the most common. Coping with male infertility can be very difficult: men can become stressed, frustrated and feel that it is very unfair, particularly as in nearly half of cases, doctors can find no reason for poor sperm production. Some underlying problems can be treated, and should be investigated before proceeding with assisted reproductive technologies, adoption or foster parenting.

#### Prostate enlargement

Although most common in older men, about **50% of all Australian men will experience prostate problems.** The most common disease is a non-cancerous enlargement of the prostate called Benign Prostatic Hyperplasia (BPH). While usually not life-threatening, BPH can make urination difficult and life uncomfortable.

Both surgical treatments and medications are available to ease the symptoms of prostate disease. However, not all urinary problems are caused by the prostate, so it's important to see your doctor.

#### Prostate cancer

Prostate cancer is very common and about 10,000 men in Australia are diagnosed with it every year. It often occurs without symptoms, so men should think about testing by rectal examination and Prostate Specific Antigen (PSA) test. There is considerable controversy about the PSA test for diagnosis of prostate cancer, so deciding to have the test should be first discussed with a doctor to understand all the benefits and risks of testing. Treatments for prostate cancer include surgery, radiation therapy and 'watchful waiting'.

#### Erectile dysfunction

Sexual disorders in men are more common than you might imagine. **Approximately one million men in Australia experience erectile dysfunction (or impotence).** In some cases, it's a symptom of a potentially life-threatening disease such as diabetes or heart disease. Even if the cause of the problem is a purely physical one, gaining some psychological support is an essential part of treatment.

There are many treatments available for erectile dysfunction – including medication – but talking to your partner and your doctor is the most important first step.

#### Testosterone deficiency

Decreased energy, mood swings, irritability, poor concentration, reduced muscle strength or a lack of interest in sex may indicate low testosterone levels. **One in 200 men in Australia suffer testosterone deficiency.**

It affects men of all ages and can be caused by a genetic or medical problem, by damage to the testes, or simply be part of the ageing process. In some older men, testosterone levels fall to a point that treatment is needed. Testosterone deficiency can only be diagnosed by a medical practitioner, who can provide treatment in the form of injections, implants, capsules or patches.

#### Testicular cancer

Testicular cancer is **the second most common cancer in men aged from 18 to 39.** But it is easy to treat and, with early detection, the cure rate is over 95%.

A hard, painless lump in the testicle is the most common symptom, but the testicle may also feel painful and tender. In a few men, constant backache, coughing or breathlessness, and enlarged or tender breasts can mean the cancer has spread. Surgical removal of the affected testicle is the first treatment for all testicular cancer. However this treatment does not normally affect sexual function or erectile function.

### 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, please call Andrology Australia on **1300 303 878** for a free information booklet, or visit our website at **[www.whateverymanneedstoknow.org.au](http://www.whateverymanneedstoknow.org.au)**





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

Andrology Australia is funded by a grant from the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing, and is committed to better educating consumers and health professionals about male reproductive health issues.

**[www.whatevermanneedstoknow.org.au](http://www.whatevermanneedstoknow.org.au)**



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AUSTRALIA**