

Concerned about testosterone levels

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Q: Please forgive my handwritten letter. There is no one in Arizona who can install a new ribbon onto my manual typewriter.

I am a man, 88 years of age, who has been plagued with poor balance for five years. I was accustomed to walking up to 10 miles a day, working as a carpenter eight hours and fitting in five hours of dancing to the big bands, getting home at 5 a.m.

One day, while watching a health program on television, the speaker said that diminished testosterone levels could be fatal. Now I'm concerned about my testosterone levels and my poor balance. What type of specialist is required?

A: Let's take the problems as you present them. Initially, I applaud your memory. There aren't too many young people who even know what a manual typewriter is or what big-band music sounds like.

I suggest you contact a local office-supply store such as Staples or OfficeMax, which should be able to locate an appropriate typewriter ribbon for you and may even be able to help you install it.

The reasons for poor balance are numerous. Perhaps you have a buildup of wax in one ear, an inner-ear problem, a central nervous system disorder such as Parkinson's, peripheral nerve disease or something else. You should either seek the services of a neurologist or return to your primary-care physician for a referral. He or she can order the appropriate testing and perhaps get to the bottom of the issue.

A recent study suggests men with low testosterone levels after the age of 40 have a higher risk of death over a four-year period than those with normal levels. The study also indicates it remains unclear whether the two conditions - low

testosterone and the higher risk of death - are even related. Further studies and research are necessary before we can confirm anything.

Testosterone levels vary considerably between people, and levels decrease naturally as a man ages. I suggest, once again, that you return to your doctor and have him arrange to have blood drawn to determine whether a problem exists. He or she is the one with a complete medical history on you. This is very important, since there is an extremely wide variation of the normal range for men. What's appropriate for one person might be entirely inappropriate for another, based on medical history. My local hospital uses a range of anything between 90 and 890.

You might even enlist the services of a urologist, who can provide appropriate answers for you. At 88, you deserve all the quality time you can muster. Get help, get those fingers nimble while typing, and enjoy your life. I'll bet you have some fascinating stories to tell.

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