

STEPHEN HARROD BUHNER

**NATURAL
REMEDIES
FOR LOW
TESTOSTERONE**

**HOW TO ENHANCE
MALE SEXUAL
HEALTH AND
ENERGY**

*“One of the most important
books on men’s health today.”*

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NATURAL REMEDIES FOR LOW TESTOSTERONE

“Stephen Buhner combines scientific research, traditional knowledge, and personal experience into what may be one of the most important books available on men’s health today. He primarily explores the little-known territory of men’s hormonal changes during midlife—a transition in men’s life that has unfortunately been largely ignored, often denied by modern medicine—and offers simple sensible solutions to help men navigate this important cycle of their lives.”

ROSEMARY GLADSTAR, HERBALIST, FOUNDER OF UNITED PLANT SAVERS, AND AUTHOR OF *PLANTING THE FUTURE: SAVING OUR MEDICINAL HERBS*

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PREFACE TO THE 2016 EDITION

“Thank You, Stephen Buhner!”

I am unsure why it is that noticing the obvious is so difficult, why seeing what is right in front of us is so hard—yet it always has been something I struggle with. For example, I had long known that many plants were useful for helping women moderate their hormone levels during menopause. More specifically, I knew that many plants contained estrogenic compounds. Hops, the most potent of them, contains large quantities of estradiol—for women’s bodies what testosterone is generally considered to be for ours. Nevertheless, for two decades (1983 to 2002), it never occurred to me to ask, “Are there any plants that contain testosterone?” That is, it didn’t occur to me until my body began the movement from young adulthood into middle age, the moment when I first experienced andropause, an experience for men similar to what menopause is for women.

Since adolescence, I had never questioned my sexual vitality. It just *was*, like the sun and the rain. Suddenly, my libido dropped precipitously. Erections became problematic. The male equivalent of hysteria (*testeria*) emerged as a daily companion. (*Hyster* comes from a word root that means “womb,” hence *hysterectomy* meaning womb removal or hysteria—overly excited womb.) So, I began to research what was happening to me. I soon discovered something that a few researchers and doctors were calling andropause. (Many other physicians, of course, insist that there is no such thing, despite the contrary experience of many of their patients. Inevitably this leads me to a number of obvious questions about those doctors, none of which I will share here.) During a man’s shift into middle age, the research revealed, the level of *free* (not bound) testosterone in most men’s bodies begins to decline. So, a number of doctors treat the condition by prescribing pharmaceutical testosterone, which does in fact raise testosterone levels and significantly reduces the accompanying problems. It was at that moment, finally, that the obvious question emerged. “Are there any plants that contain testosterone?”

Astonishingly enough, no one in the natural medicine world, prior to that

moment, had (apparently) asked that question. Certainly, no one had written anything about it. Nor did anyone seem to know of any plants that would increase testosterone levels similarly to the way pharmaceuticals did. *Everyone*, of course, had written, *ad nauseum*, about ginseng as an important herb for men. Ginseng does contain some androgenic compounds and can *help* during andropause, but it is not suitable for testosterone replacement. It is more of a male tonic herb than a hormone replacement herb. For what I wanted to accomplish, I needed something that contained testosterone itself and enough of it that it would work for hormone replacement. And so the search began.

Inevitably, it turned out that there are indeed many plants that contain testosterone, chemically identical to the testosterone in our bodies. The (obvious) reason is that these compounds are ubiquitous in nature as hormone regulators for *all* split gender organisms. This includes plants. (There is a reason why so many plants contain estrogenic compounds. It is just that it never occurred to any of us to ask what the reason was.) These hormonal compounds predate our species' emergence by hundreds of millions of years. So, yes, testosterone is in plants, it is just that no one in the herbal world, for reasons I cannot fathom, ever thought to look for it.

Ultimately, it turned out that there was one plant on earth (no doubt there are others) that was loaded with testosterone. In fact, in comparison to our body's natural levels, it contains huge quantities of it. (It contains a number of other potent androgenic compounds as well, again identical to those in our bodies.) That plant is the pine tree, most especially its pollen.

Despite the fact that pine pollen has been used in Asia (primarily Korea, China, and Japan) for thousands of years and despite the eagerness of many American herbalists for using traditional Chinese medicines, no one had ever (apparently) thought to bring that particular plant to our continent. Finding some for my use was a bit difficult, but I was testical so find it I did. Once obtained, I tinctured it and began to use it as medicine. Within a few days, my andropausal symptoms began to decline and ultimately disappeared.

I am a writer (an obsession since childhood), so I began work on a book about natural testosterone and men's health. It was ultimately titled (badly, by the publisher) *Vital Man* (Avery, 2003), and, unlike my other books, immediately went out of print. As I always do, before suggesting an herb in something I am writing, I actively tried to find someone who could provide it. Some dear friends in upper New York state, Kate Gilday and Don Babineau, who had a small herb business (Woodland Essence) agreed to collect the pollen from their trees and make it into a tincture for sale to the public. (They also

began to grow David's lily, discussed in a moment, but it proved too difficult for the climate.)

Regrettably, due to the book's quick demise, only a few people (which fortunately included some knowledgeable physicians) ever read the thing. The tincture that Kate and Don made was in fact a very good one and did sell moderately well for them—but only in dribbles and bits. Pine pollen tincture, as a testosterone concept, continued to linger in some sort of phyto-purgatory. Then, in 2007, Healing Arts Press agreed to reissue the first five chapters of *Vital Man* as *The Natural Testosterone Plan*. For some reason, known only to small children and puppies, when the book came out, pine pollen just took off. The raw food movement discovered it and people such as Daniel Vitalis began touting its virtues and suddenly everyone seemed to be interested in it. In a short period of time a large number of YouTube videos were uploaded, showing anyone who was interested how to harvest and prepare pine pollen. And suddenly here we were, pine pollen a part of the American pharmacopeia of herbal medicine. Finally.

Over the past decade, I have heard from hundreds of men (and their wives) who have used pine pollen for andropausal problems, including low libido and erectile dysfunction. All have reported how well it works for them. It works as well as, and in my opinion better than, pharmaceutical testosterone. Importantly, it does not possess the same side effects that pharmaceutical testosterone does (also discussed a bit in the book). To be fair, however, despite my continued warnings that the herb is *not* for bodybuilders, or those in their twenties, a number of body builders have insisted on using the tincture in large quantities (an ounce at a time, several times a day) in their fixation on becoming a modern-day Hercules. They began to report (on the Internet) testes shrinkage, one of the side effects of pharmaceutical testosterone. So, yes it does work, and no it is *not* for bodybuilders or for use by young men, and no you really should not take it an ounce at a time.

You will notice that I mention another testosterone-containing herb in this book, David's lily. It is a much more difficult herb to grow and to prepare for use; it is still not available. Despite my hopes that younger herbalists would begin to take the study of testosterone-containing herbs further, that has not happened. (Perhaps *you* are the one who will.) Still, pine pollen is tremendously abundant. Pine trees make tons of it (literally) every year.

And yes, before you ask, I still take it every day and have since 2002. As I enter the early stages of old age I find my free testosterone levels falling ever lower, necessitating an increase in dosage. Even at this time in my life, it

continues to work well, keeping my testosterone levels, and my sexual vitality, high. (Only the tincture works for this by the way, for reasons I discuss in the book.) I am pretty sure that, if you are suffering low testosterone levels, it will help you, too. You don't, however, need to shout out during sex (as one couple recently told me), "Thank you, Stephen Buhner. Thank you!" You can just, quietly, go on with your life, testosterone levels high.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book is intended to help men who are experiencing low androgen levels and the attendant physical and emotional problems that go along with them. It is also intended to introduce to a wider audience the idea of phytoandrogens, that is, plants that contain male hormones. While work on phytoestrogens, plants that contain female hormones, is fairly advanced and widely known, the concept of phytoandrogens is not.

In general, the material in this book is intended for men over 40. Few men under that age need hormone replacement therapy. When men move into their own midlife shift, a shift that is equal in its impacts to the one experienced by women at menopause, the process is often difficult. The difficulty comes from two sources. The first is our culture's lack of recognition of and support for this shift in maleness. The second is the scores to hundreds of chemicals that are present in the environment that act as endocrine disruptors, that is, they affect, often significantly, the hormonal balance in the male body.

The use of plants as foods and medicines can often alleviate many of the problems men experience during the midlife shift. Some of these plants contain testosterone, molecularly identical to that produced in our bodies. Many possess other androgens or androgen analogues; some act through specific mechanisms to keep testosterone levels high.

In each section of the book, in order to facilitate easy access to the information the plant, supplement, and food protocols are usually outlined in a box at the beginning of that chapter. You may use any or all of these protocols to enhance your levels of testosterone. As with all protocols intended to alter physical states, you should pay close attention to your own body and determine just which ones work best for you. You, after all, know yourself better than anyone else ever will. You will know if these things work for you, what dosages are best, and how long you need to take them. What I offer here are guidelines only, the beginning of a dialogue about more natural means to help men through this shift. It is my hope that men will come to explore their own midlife shifting, that wide recognition of the importance and process of that shift occurs, and that each generation of men will eventually be supported in this move into a new

kind of maleness.

The information and plants in this book helped me a great deal and it is my hope that they will help you as well.



“Illegitimi non carborundum”

1 THE IMPORTANCE OF NATURAL HORMONE SUPPORT FOR MEN

All of us have two lives: the life we learn with and the life we live with after.

GLENN CLOSE, IN *THE NATURAL*

One of the more amusing stories about scientific research details the year-long, \$100,000 program to determine why children fall off their tricycles. After several well-designed studies were completed and the highly degreed researchers had compiled and analyzed their data, they found that children fall off their tricycles because they lose their balance.

This story often comes back to me when I read various pronouncements from members of the medical profession, and never more often than when I read that there is no such thing as andropause (male menopause). Essentially, they say that because no study has found it, it does not exist. The comments of millions of men that they just don't feel like themselves and that something is wrong are passed off as psychological—our minds playing tricks on us. This same kind of denial has also occurred when discussing women's reproductive conditions, such as menstruation, pregnancy, and menopause. In response, women have pioneered research and exploration into the changes that occur for them during these times and none more so than those that occur during their passage into menopause. Men are long overdue for their own exploration into this territory because the changes that we experience are just as profound, just as life altering, and just as pervasive as those experienced by women. Although it is true that men, at advanced ages, can still participate in creating children and women cannot, there are significant alterations in men's hormonal chemistries as they age, just as there are with women.

Sudden shifts in body chemistries occur for all of us during the major passages in human life: birth, adolescence, middle age, old age, and death. Most of us can remember our shift into adolescence. Our bodies were changing

radically, preparing us for reproduction and independence. At the same time, just as significantly, our minds and spirits were shifting, preparing us for life as adults, for love and families of our own, for careers, and our individual and unique destinies.

These shifts had tremendous physical and emotional impacts as we moved into adolescence. Our bodies changed shape, our skin altered, we began growing hair in places it had not grown before, and our voices deepened. In short, our entire appearance changed. And, just as significant, how the world saw us changed. We had to get used to a new “image,” a new “face.” The person we saw when we looked in mirrors, those at home and those in people’s eyes, had changed. The young boy we had been was gone, and a new someone had come to take his place. At the same time, a similar process was occurring in our minds and spirits. New options for life were opening up and the world of sex lay before us, with vast horizons of reproductive options and attractive bodies in endless variation. We were learning new interaction styles and figuring out where we wanted to go, what we wanted to do, and who we wanted to be as adults. A certain force of personality, an older self, had begun to take us over and come into being.

That new way of being—the physical, emotional, and spiritual processes of an adolescent and young adult that came into being as we moved out of childhood—had a certain life span, a certain arc, a period of growth, development, maturity, and then senescence or ending. A transition process, in many ways similar to adolescence, occurs again when we enter the middle of life. We look in the mirror and notice that someone new is taking the place of that young man we were. Then, one day, we mildly flirt with a young woman, much as we always have done since our movement into adolescence, and instead of the usual response, one we had become used to over long years of social interaction, the response we get is different. Her eyes respond with, “You’re old enough to be my father.” In that moment, the changes that have begun catch up with us. We, whether we want to or not, have entered middle age.

Daily, this new truth is reflected back to us. We look in the eyes of attractive women, and the reflection we see is strange, distorted, and middle-aged. A certain shock runs through our system, and we begin to grapple with our own aging process and the end of an earlier, important period of male life. As with adolescence, there are emotional and spiritual components that are essential aspects to this change as well. We begin to examine our lives, to see what we have done and have not done, to sum up, and to take stock. Our function as a man begins to change. Now it is not so much concerned with the reproduction of

children but with something else, something that our society is not so clear about, so it is harder to identify, harder to grasp. This cultural unclarity as so many of us find out, makes it harder to resolve this change, this shifting that occurs in midlife. At the same time, we notice our body *is* older. The impacts of twenty or thirty years of riotous, reproductive living, of raising children, learning our trades, surviving our mistakes have all taken their toll. Parts of our bodies are not working as well as they once did. As with adolescence, our bodies are ready for something else, some other function, a function that our society is not so clear about. And so we struggle with that during this midlife change.

The United States is a young country. In many ways our culture is still an adolescent and, as such, is concerned with adolescent things: sex and reproduction, protection of territory, making money, asserting independence, the freedom to do and say what we want, and being top dog. All these things are integral to the movement into adolescence and young adulthood. However, in middle age something else begins to happen. Because our culture is so unclear about what that is, each of us struggles perhaps more than we should with what we are becoming and the new tasks that lie before us. Many of us begin to realize that although it is true that if you are not top dog the view never changes, if you are top dog, the dogs behind you always see you as one thing. We begin to see that there is something other than the adolescent drives that we have known for so long.

Historically, many cultures have understood this transition much better than we now do. Middle age was recognized for its importance, as were the tasks that lay before the newly awakening middle-aged man. The Jungian analyst James Hillman is one of the few writers struggling to understand the territory of middle and old age and its importance. In his book *The Force of Character and the Lasting Life*, he makes a deeply insightful point when he remarks:

The transition [to middle age] is first of all psychological, and to me it means this: It is not we who are leaving, but a set of attitudes and interpretations regarding the body and the mind that have outlasted their usefulness—and their youthfulness. We are being forced to leave them behind. They can no longer sustain us, not because we are old, but because *they* are old.¹

Middle age and old age are not simply the wearing out of the body but also the movement into new territories of self, into new tasks as human beings. As Hillman goes on to say, “Aging is no accident. It is necessary to the human

condition, intended by the soul.” Emotionally, we are, in fact, coming to terms with our youth, thinking it over. The dreams of who we would become, made during adolescence, are pulled out of the cupboard, dusted off, and examined. We compare them to what we have actually done. Then we look over who we are and what we want to do now. It is common to be less interested in the accumulation of power, reproduction, or making money and more interested in the respect of our peers, intimacy, and developing a new wealth of experience of the world. Often, men become more interested in learning, travel, and helping younger generations through their own struggles with young adulthood. We see our children into adulthood and our parents out. We look at who we are and discover important things that we must still accomplish, and often we leave one career and begin another, one more concerned, quite often, with deeper aesthetic values.

After this transition, men remain vital, strong, and possessed of new insights, tasks, skills, and strengths. Yet we *are* different. A new form of man has emerged. There is, in fact, a unique ego state that emerges, one as distinctive as that of the two-year-old, the four-year-old, or the adolescent. Like those other crucial developmental ego states, this one, too, is biologically encoded to emerge at a specific time, for a specific reason.

The lack of understanding in our culture of the importance of this new developmental stage of the self, of what it means, what it is for, and just how to move into it gracefully, makes the transition all the more difficult. We enter new territories of self that must be encountered, explored, and experimented with in order for them to be fully realized and for this new way of being to be integrated and whole. Of necessity, we must grieve the loss of that older self, the young man with whom we have lived so long. Eventually, if the territory is fully entered and fully encountered, its shape, its terrain, begins to make sense. We begin to find out who we are now and what we are meant to do. There is a celebration of sorts, and many of us come to know ourselves and our purposes here better than we ever have.

All of this takes work. It takes time, and if we are lucky, we can take that time away from work and family and the responsibilities that we have undertaken over the years of our lives. We can take the time to journey inside ourselves and to do this work in interior time.

This would be challenging enough were it the only thing to be dealt with, but there is another factor that makes it harder still, a factor that interferes with the successful transition into a healthy, vital middle age: the pervasiveness of chemicals throughout the ecosystem that mimic the actions of estrogens (female

hormones). The powerful and historically unique presence of these chemistries in our ecosystem and on our bodies cannot be overstated. Their daily intake, through our food and water, alters the hormonal balance of our bodies and, during the shift into middle age, exacerbates the normal changes that our bodies are biologically intended to make. This results, quite often, not only in loss of energy and libido, but in a number of disease conditions that commonly plague men in later life: infertility, impotence, heart disease, and so on.

During our shift into middle age, our body chemistry begins to change. Testosterone and other androgen (male hormone) levels start to shift in important ways. Our bodies broaden out, our ears grow bigger and longer, hair, once again, begins to appear in unusual places (and disappear in others). These are normal changes. They and many others are elements of our shift into another kind of maleness. But something is interfering with this natural shift of our bodies. Researchers who study the endocrine system now realize that environmental estrogenic pollutants and substances are entering our bodies in tremendous quantities. When they do so, they shift the balance from testosterone (and other androgens) toward the estrogen side of the equation. Like women, we do have estrogens in our bodies (just as they have testosterone), we just don't have the same quantities, and we have a great deal more testosterone than they do. What is most important is the ratio of androgens to estrogens. Anything that upsets that balance changes who and what we become. We are not our chemistry, but we certainly are affected by our chemistry. The power of our androgenic chemistry to shape who we are begins while we are still in the womb.

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