

Men with COPD may benefit from extra testosterone

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Men with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) -- which includes a number of lung problems such as emphysema that make breathing difficult -- may benefit from an extra dose of testosterone, a new study indicates.

People with COPD are often easily fatigued and can't tolerate much physical exertion, probably because of loss of muscle strength. Testosterone supplementation appears to increase lean muscle mass and strength in men with moderate to severe COPD and low testosterone levels, LA BioMed researchers report in the American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine.

"Patients with chronic lung disease have been found to benefit from rehabilitative therapies aimed at improving the function of their muscles. This research suggests the anabolic drug testosterone improves muscle strength," says Dr. Richard Casaburi. Casaburi and colleagues investigated the effects of testosterone supplementation in a study of 47 men with COPD and low normal testosterone levels.

The participants were randomly assigned to one of four treatment groups: testosterone supplementation and strength training; placebo and strength training; testosterone and no strength training; or placebo and no strength training. After 10 weeks, both testosterone groups showed a significant increase in lean body mass. This amounted to an average increase of 2.3 kilograms (about 5 pounds) in those given testosterone alone and 3.3 kg (a little more than 7 pounds) in those who received training and testosterone.

Moreover, the team found that maximum leg press strength increased 17 percent with either testosterone alone or training alone, but by 27 percent with both. No adverse effects were seen. Despite these encouraging results, "further research in a larger number of patients is needed before we can routinely recommend testosterone supplementation for men with COPD," Casaburi cautioned.