Testosterone May Improve Quality of Life for Cancer Patients

The natural hormone could also help those at high risk for muscle loss in maintaining eligibility to receive standard cancer therapies.

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Cancer wasting, also known as cachexia, is responsible for 20 percent of cancer deaths. But new findings published in the Journal of Cachexia, Sarcopenia and Muscle suggest that testosterone may boost lean body mass and improve quality of life for cancer patients, reports Texas A&M University.

Cachexia is loss of fat, skeletal muscle and muscle function as a result of cancer. According to the National Cancer Institute, it occurs in patients with many different cancers. But cachexia is most common in people with pancreatic, gastric, lung, esophageal, colorectal, head and neck cancers. The condition can make even simple tasks, such as walking, difficult to complete.

For the five-year study, researchers set out to show that the testosterone could help improve quality of life. Initially, the trial enrolled 28 patients with advanced-stage cancers who were undergoing chemotherapy and radiation. However, a total of 21 patients were included in the final analysis.

Patients were assigned to receive weekly injections of either 100 milligrams of testosterone enanthate or a placebo for seven weeks. Those who received testosterone were able to maintain total body mass or increase lean body mass, which is important because most patients experience a 20 percent decrease (or more) in mass depending upon the type of cancer.

“We hoped to demonstrate [that] these patients would go from not feeling well enough to even get out of bed to at least being able to have some basic quality of life that allows them to take care of themselves,” said Melinda Sheffield-Moore, PhD, a professor and head of the Department of Health and Kinesiology at Texas A&M University.

According to Sheffield-Moore, patients who were given testosterone showed enhanced physical performance such that they were able to get up and do regular activities, such as cooking, cleaning and taking baths.

Researchers hope these findings will help those at high risk for muscle loss maintain eligibility to

receive standard cancer therapies, as loss of body mass can reduce qualifications for treatments like radiation and chemotherapy.

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