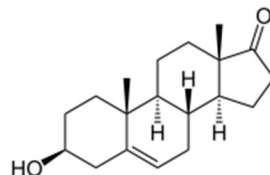


DHEA



What is DHEA?

Dehydroepiandrosterone (DHEA) is a natural steroid hormone produced by the human body in the adrenal glands, the gonads and the brain^{1,2}. It is the most abundant circulating steroid hormone in the human body. It has effects on numerous bodily systems, and leads to the production of androgens and oestrogens (male and female sex hormones)



What is DHEA used for?

DHEA supplementation may treat or prevent some diseases and conditions. Current evidence suggests that DHEA is effective for the treatment of obesity, osteoporosis, ageing skin, and in alleviating some of the symptoms of depression³. Other promising uses include as an anti-ageing supplement, as an adjunct in IVF (in vitro fertilisation), for increasing strength in the elderly, in various hormonal disorders (e.g., adrenal insufficiency), for improving sexual function, and for the treatment of lupus (an autoimmune disorder that affects the skin and organs). DHEA has also been studied for a range of other uses, including the treatment of HIV/AIDS, multiple sclerosis, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), schizophrenia, and severe injury.

What causes DHEA deficiency?

DHEA production peaks at around age 20. After about 30 years of age, DHEA levels begin to decrease in the human body, and more rapidly in women. People with hormonal disorders, HIV/AIDS, Alzheimer's disease, heart disease, depression, diabetes, inflammation, immune disorders, and osteoporosis may have reduced levels of DHEA. Oral contraceptives, corticosteroids (e.g., cortisol, hydrocortisone), and drugs used in the treatment of psychiatric disorders may also reduce DHEA levels

Increasing DHEA levels

Regular exercise increases the body's production of DHEA^{4,5}. Calorie restriction (reduced food intake with sufficient nutrients) has also been shown to increase DHEA in primates, and it has been suggested that this increase may be partially responsible for the longer life expectancy that is associated with calorie restriction^{6,7}.

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Where DHEA levels are insufficient, supplementation in the form of various medications is an effective method of increasing its levels. In Australia, a prescription from a doctor is required to purchase DHEA-containing medications. While DHEA can be made in the laboratory from chemicals found in wild yam and soy, the human body cannot make DHEA from these chemicals. Increases in DHEA levels cannot be achieved by eating wild yam or soy, or products made from wild yam or soy. Do not be misled by such products, which are sometimes labelled as "natural DHEA."

How to use DHEA

DHEA is available in a wide variety of dosage forms (for example, capsules, creams, ointments, and pessaries), and these should be taken or applied as directed by your doctor

Possible side effects

DHEA is safe for most people when used for short-term therapy (just a few months) and/or when levels are monitored regularly by your doctor. Side effects are more likely when used in higher doses and/or over longer periods³. Such side effects including acne, hair loss, stomach upset, and high blood pressure. Some women may experience changes in menstrual cycle, facial hair growth, and a deeper voice

References

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