

Irritable Male Syndrome

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MenAlive

Many American men share an under diagnosed condition known as Irritable Male Syndrome (IMS). The term was first coined by a Scottish researcher, Dr. Gerald Lincoln. He found that when the testosterone levels in the animals he was studying dropped, they became more irritable and lethargic.

IMS is not the same as depression, although that often is one component. Rather, men with IMS experience a constellation of symptoms, including episodes of hypersensitivity, anxiety, frustration, moodiness and anger. In addition to declines in testosterone, main causes include biochemical imbalances and stress -- about money, relationships, sexual performance, etc. Nearly half of men surveyed reported feeling stressed much of the time. Standard depression treatments, including the use of antidepressants, can help to some extent, but they won't necessarily address all the symptoms of IMS.

In addition to having a thorough health checkup, including a blood test for testosterone, most men with IMS will gain relief by following this four-step plan...

Step 1: Acknowledge the problem. Men with IMS progress through the four stages of denial before they can begin to get better...

- Failing to notice the initial symptoms.
- Downplaying the importance of the symptoms once they notice them.
- Recognizing that something is wrong but casting blame outward. They'll say things like "My wife has really been on my case lately" or "I can't believe the idiots I have to work with."
- Understanding that others are not to blame for the problem. Men can't begin to escape from the cycle of negativity until they reach this final stage.

Helpful: Keep a diary, and write down every incident that you consider "negative," such as snapping at your partner or having arguments with coworkers. Men need to see hard facts before they take action.

Step 2: Strengthen your body. We can't always control the amount of stress in our lives, but we can help dispel it. One way to do that is with daily exercise. Every man should set aside at least a half-hour daily for strenuous exercise, such as fast walking, lifting weights, playing tennis, etc.

Bonus: Regular exercise increases brain levels of serotonin, the same neurotransmitter that is elevated by prescription antidepressants.

Step 3: Expand your mind. Men with IMS tend to view the world through "irritable lenses," putting a negative spin on situations and actions. *Example:* One morning, my wife seemed unresponsive when I hugged her. My automatic thought was that she was angry with me. When I

thought more about it, I reminded myself that she is never outgoing in the morning and that we had been very close the night before. Her behavior very likely had nothing to do with me.

Helpful: Fill out a "thought record" when you're feeling negative. Write down details of the situation... what automatic thoughts go through your mind... evidence that supports or disproves those thoughts... and an alternative, more positive way of looking at the situation.

Step 4: Deepen the spirit. There are times in our lives when we know we need to make changes but are held back by fear -- and the feeling of being stuck increases our sense of powerlessness and anger.

Listen to your inner voice. Maybe you have always wanted to spend more time enjoying nature, take up painting or photography, or volunteer for a community group. Make time for it. It will give you the energy and passion that you need to deal with the inevitable frustrations of day-to-day living.

Do You Have IMS?

If you check six or more of the following symptoms, you may be suffering from Irritable Male Syndrome.

I often feel...

- Grumpy
- Angry
- Gloomy
- Impatient
- Lonely
- Hostile
- Annoyed
- Touchy
- Overworked
- Unloved
- Jealous
- Stressed

You can take the full IMS questionnaire and have it scored for free at www.theirritablemale.com.