Testosterone May Provide Protection Against Autoimmune Disorders Says New Study

A new study published by the National Academy of Sciences has identified testosterone as one of the reasons men have far fewer incidences of autoimmune disorders. Scientists from the department of microbiology and immunology at Northwestern University looked at mast cells, immune cells that produce histamines in response to allergic reactions. In female mice, mast cells produced pro-inflammatory signaling molecules called cytokines. When exposed to testosterone though, the cytokines sent the opposite message, signaling the immune system to relax. Science has given estrogen the edge when it comes to surviving famine and disease, but this study suggests that testosterone might have more to offer than we previously knew.

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Chronic Inflammation and Autoimmune Conditions

Women are three to nine times more likely than men to develop an autoimmune disorder like lupus, rheumatoid arthritis, celiac disease, fibromyalgia, and others. This study supports the possibility that out of balance hormones may be more important than we are currently considering. Without the protection of testosterone, a woman’s immune system produced signals calling for inflammation, the reaction to harmful substances. While inflammation is not inherently a bad thing, a constantly triggered immune system and chronic inflammation can lead to serious autoimmune disorders.

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Consequences

Many women don't develop an autoimmune disorder, and 20% of the diagnoses of those conditions are for men. It isn't as simple as testosterone. But we mess with hormones far more than we understand them, and this study it clear that we still don't fully understand our bodies holistically.

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For example, women develop autoimmune disorders much earlier in life than men. From a hormonal standpoint, this echoes some aspects of conventional hormone management. Women are prescribed regular birth control at an early age, while many men address hormone-centric issues like erectile dysfunction with pharmaceuticals later in life. Do we know what we are doing to ourselves?

Sources:

- *Testosterone may protect men from autoimmune diseases* – Ars Technica
- *Male-specific IL-33 expression regulates sex-dimorphic EAE susceptibility* – PNAS
- Women *are More Likely to Survive Famine and Disease Epidemics Because They are 'Hardier', Study Finds* – Independent