

DHEA: The Age Gauge Hormone

DHEA (aka dehydroepiandrosterone) is primarily produced by the adrenal glands and derived from cholesterol. It's the most prevalent hormone in the human body and many researchers regard DHEA as a biomarker of aging itself - somewhat of an "age-gauge."

DHEA is known to have many beneficial effects. It's a precursor, or building block, for other hormones such as testosterone, estrogen and progesterone. However, that's not the only function of DHEA. It's accepted that maintaining an optimal level of DHEA is important for optimal health and aging. Research has shown that DHEA levels decline steadily with age. Most people produce about half the amount of DHEA at age 40 than they did at age 20.

Studies have shown that low levels of DHEA are associated with increased mortality from heart disease and cancer, and higher levels are actually protective against heart disease and cancer. DHEA is also known to improve the function of the immune system, relieve stress, increase energy and reduce body fat. Many of these benefits are a result of DHEA shifting the body from a catabolic (breakdown) state to an anabolic (protein-building) state. In addition, DHEA has shown to increase insulin sensitivity, which means the body needs less insulin and/or the body utilizes insulin more efficiently. This may help reduce one's risk of diabetes.

There are many reasons to consider optimizing your levels of DHEA, including improving quality of life and potentially delaying the onset of multiple consequences of aging. With optimal levels of DHEA, you may sleep better, have more energy and be more productive in dealing with life stress.

Despite being a powerful hormone, DHEA is available over-the-counter as a supplement. However, I would discourage purchasing a "grocery store" product as you can't be assured of the quality and absorption. Instead, I recommend a pharmaceutical-grade DHEA supplement to better ensure optimal levels in the body. I would also recommend that you have your blood drawn to determine your DHEA level and continue to have your levels monitored while supplementing with DHEA. Monitoring blood levels of DHEA and using high-quality supplement brand should be a standard practice.

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