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DOES TRIBULUS TERRESTRIS BOOST TESTOSTERONE? WHAT STUDIES SAY



Tribulus, the dethroned king of testosterone boosting herbs.

It used to be everywhere and pretty much started the whole testosterone boosting genre when it comes to dietary supplements. You couldn't buy sports supplements without seeing it recommended.

It's still sold nowadays but nowhere near as frequently as in the past. What happened to dethrone this guy and, to the people still using it, are they getting something that we're not or did they just miss the memo?

WHAT IS TRIBULUS TERRESTRIS?

Tribulus terrestris is an herb from traditional Indian medicine known as Ayurveda. It has traditionally been used as an herb to promote male sexual wellness, health, and virility.

When it comes to dietary supplements it was perhaps the first herbal supplement to be widely marketed as a testosterone booster. It was very popular in the past (late 1990's and early 2,000's) but, since more evidence has come out, hops between being irrelevant and being hyped once more.

WHY DO PEOPLE SUPPLEMENT WITH TRIBULUS TERRESTRIS?

The most common reason for supplementing with tribulus terrestris is due to the claims that it increases testosterone concentrations in the body, thereby increasing strength and muscle gains and getting potential benefits to cognition and sexuality.

Beyond that, tribulus hasn't really seen much usage for other goals. Some people take it for fertility and sexual enhancement reasons, to get in the mood for some love making, but they are sort of secondary reasons related to the testosterone claims.

DOES TRIBULUS TERRESTRIS WORK?

Tribulus has been studied for varying topics. For this section, I'll go through both animal and human research since human evidence is lacking in some areas but, hey, sometimes we have to deal with that if we want to be comprehensive.

Does Tribulus Terrestris Increase Testosterone?

The main claim to fame associated with tribulus terrestris is the supposed increase in testosterone after supplementing with it.

Theory aside, the best way to answer the question “Does this increase testosterone?” is to just give it to humans and see what happens. We see a failure, another failure, one more failure, and just to rub salt in the wound there wasn’t even an increase in LH seen.

On the other hand, tribulus also has insignificant inhibitory effects on the 5-alpha reductase enzyme, which reduces the breakdown of testosterone. So, theoretically it could increase testosterone by preserving it rather than creating more of it. That hasn’t worked out in the research, though.

So right now, it seems like a pretty useless testosterone booster right? Wrong.

Actually, maybe. Context is needed.

There is indeed a study showing an increase in testosterone associated with tribulus, in men with partial androgen deficiency (PADAM). Nothing astounding, we’re talking a 33% increase in testosterone and 5.7% increase in free testosterone in people with really low test to begin with.

Another study looking at populations that aren’t in ideal androgen conditions however, namely in unexplained male fertility, failed to see an increase in testosterone so even then it doesn’t have much consistency.

Funny story though, this might be a case of misattribution. The fruits of tribulus terrestris are called Gokshura/Gokhru in ayurvedic medicine but this title can also refer to the plant *pedalium murex* which, while understudied, at least has rodent evidence of increasing testosterone. Heck, even tribulus alatus, a related plant, has rodent evidence for this.

So there is still some potential, hidden deep down, for tribulus to have an effect on testosterone but rather than being a sports supplement it’s more of a male health supplement; like saw palmetto or *eurycoma longifolia*.

Does Tribulus Terrestris Increase Sex Drive?

Even if it doesn’t increase testosterone per se, tribulus could potentially influence cognition by other means.

The only human study on the topic looked at sexual well being as more of a side measurement rather than the main point of the study but, in men with low sperm count, tribulus seemed to make them happier with their sex lives more than placebo.

As for reasons why this occurs, we aren't too certain right now. There is at least one study showing that the androgen receptor in the hypothalamus (a brain region known to be involved in sexual desire) while another suggests specific antioxidant properties of tribulus that could be closely related to sexual dysfunction.

Both theories, however, still need to be hammered out a bit more.

In human studies, tribulus has twice failed to improve erectile function in men who suffer from it. The only positive study is the aforementioned one in PADAM which did see a betterment of symptoms.

Is Tribulus Terrestris an Antioxidant?

Given how one of the aforementioned theories on tribulus, related to sexual function, was due to an antioxidant effect (most people don't think testosterone boosting herbs are healthy) it deserves a more direct look.

Tribulus terrestris has been shown to protect the liver, kidneys, and testicles when given alongside toxins that cause oxidative damage; suggesting some manner of a protective role.

While not overly potent, tribulus does appear to have some manner of protective effects in the body. It could be related to antioxidant actions, it could not be, nobody really knows the specific mechanism right now.

Does Tribulus Terrestris Help Male Health?

There does seem to be a protein in tribulus that has antilithiatic properties (it helps reduce the formation of kidney stones) and protects cells from oxalate-induced damage. When tested in rats, tribulus has been seen to reduce kidney stone formation.

There may also be a diuretic and contractile effect on smooth muscle which is thought to be another reason why it's recommended in traditional medicine to expel kidney stones.

There is also a human study where tribulus was able to reduce prostate size and improve symptoms in benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH), something that is

hilariously enough associated with anti-androgenic compounds for the most part (there are some exceptions, like saw palmetto, which doesn't interact with androgens).

DOES TRIBULUS TERRESTRIS HAVE ANY SIDE EFFECTS?

At this moment in time there are no human studies showing side effects with tribulus. It either works infrequently, or it's just as inert as placebo.

Similar to the other sections, studies on the side effects of tribulus are in their infancy. At the very least it didn't seem to cause any overt problems in the human studies conducted so far.

THE BOTTOM LINE ON TRIBULUS TERRESTRIS

The bottom line is that tribulus terrestris is a pretty bad testosterone boosting supplement for athletes who want to get the best out of the gym, which is by far the most common use of this herb.

However, it would be wrong to say that it's useless overall. While it isn't outright "proven" (at least to a satisfactory degree) in any sense, there is a lot of suspicion that it could help with a few problems. These issues that it could help with include kidney stones, benign prostatic hyperplasia, and libido which seem to be in line with what it was traditionally recommended for (an all-around herb for male health and wellness).

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