

## What is DHEA?

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DHEA is the abbreviation for dihydroepiandrosterone. It is a hormone produced by the adrenal glands in men and in women. The production of this hormone causes a subsequent increase in the production of estradiol and testosterone. In women, after menopause, DHEA becomes the main source of hormone production.

The production of DHEA declines with aging in both men and women. At times of stress, when excess cortisol is produced by the body, there is an automatic decline in DHEA levels. Causes of stress can include physical illness along with emotional stressors due to work, social and family pressures. When the level of DHEA falls below that expected for a person's age and when there has been significant stress to the body, supplementation can be considered.

DHEA levels may also be lowered in diabetic patients on insulin therapy and patients who take prednisone on a regular basis.

DHEA is sold without prescription in the United States as a supplement. It is not commercially available in Canada and therefore must be prepared at a compounding pharmacy when ordered by prescription.

The benefits of DHEA supplementation may include:

- Improved general feelings of well-being through increased strength, energy and muscle tone, thus helping with a generalized feeling of fatigue
- Improved skin and hair quality
- Improved libido

At low doses under 50mg, adverse effects are infrequent. If you are currently on a prescription treatment to **lower** estrogen and testosterone levels in the system, then DHEA is not recommended.

If you are interested in pursuing DHEA supplementation, pharmacists specializing in compounding can advise you on the pricing and drug plan eligibility. The government of Ontario drug insurance plan for senior citizens and those on disability, along with the Trillium plan do not cover specialty compounded medications. Private insurance plans with the exception of Green Shield may cover the cost of compounded DHEA.

*the possibilities are endless...*