Low testosterone is a real problem, but few actually have it. Nonprescription supplements are unproven, doctors say.

Low testosterone, or hypogonadism, is a legitimate health problem. Men who have it can suffer a variety of conditions, from low energy and sex drive to depression, weight gain and even bone loss. But chances are, you don’t have this problem, and neither do many of the men you know. That hasn’t prevented a wave of interest in testosterone-replacement therapy. At the top of the hierarchy are the prescription-only gels and injections that replace the diminished hormone with synthetic testosterone. At the other, much more dubious, end of the spectrum are the dozens of over-the-counter supplements that purport to help the body boost its own T-levels naturally.

“It’s just a bunch of nonsense,” said Dr. C. Philip O’Carroll, director of the neurobehavioral medicine program at Hoag Neuroscience Institute in Newport Beach.

“It’s actually an epidemic,” said Peter R. Przekop, director of the pain management program at the Betty Ford Center in Rancho Mirage.

If this increase in deaths among women were related to breast cancer, women would be marching in the streets. But the causes of painkiller overdose among women are complex and the responsibility for the deaths is shared. (In contrast, painkiller overdose deaths increased by 265 percent among men during the same time frame.)

Perhaps 2 percent of the U.S. male population ages 40-79 needs a testosterone supplement like Eli Lilly’s Axiron, research shows.

Get ripped! Or maybe just ripped off

Low testosterone is a real problem, but few actually have it. Nonprescription supplements are unproven, doctors say.

Low testosterone, or hypogonadism, is a legitimate health problem. Men who have it can suffer a variety of conditions, from low energy and sex drive to depression, weight gain and even bone loss. But chances are, you don’t have this problem, and neither do many of the men you know. That hasn’t prevented a wave of interest in testosterone-replacement therapy. At the top of the hierarchy are the prescription-only gels and injections that replace the diminished hormone with synthetic testosterone. At the other, much more dubious, end of the spectrum are the dozens of over-the-counter supplements that purport to help the body boost its own T-levels naturally.

“It’s just a bunch of nonsense,” said Dr. C. Philip O’Carroll, director of the neurobehavioral medicine program at Hoag Neuroscience Institute in Newport Beach.

“It’s actually an epidemic,” said Peter R. Przekop, director of the pain management program at the Betty Ford Center in Rancho Mirage.

If this increase in deaths among women were related to breast cancer, women would be marching in the streets. But the causes of painkiller overdose among women are complex and the responsibility for the deaths is shared. (In contrast, painkiller overdose deaths increased by 265 percent among men during the same time frame.)
Dr. Ellis Levin said of the supplements. “They had stupid ads,” he said. “And they were everywhere. You couldn’t escape them.”

“Your grandma probably used to take estrogen, but testosterone is a whole different matter,” said Dr. Ellis Levin, chief of endocrinology, diabetes and metabolism at UC Irvine Medical Center.

“Drugs are products billed as testosterone boosters,” Levin said.

“Just a bunch of nonsense. So people can claim whatever they want, and nobody will hold them accountable,” Levin said.

Levin said synthetic testosterone shots are “very dangerous.”

“Generally, our feeling is if you’re in the 200 nanogram range, you’re not going to do anything,” he said.

“I begin an investigation,” he said. “There is something wrong if someone younger than age 40 has low testosterone, before they consider it a normal part of aging. Generally, our feeling is if you’re in the 200 nanogram range, you might be considered a normal part of aging. That’s what we’re looking for.”

“Smart people don’t do that,” he said.

Levin said that claim was absurd.

“It’s a very unique herb. What it also has been used for years in Southeast Asia and much broader world is its aphrodisiac qualities,” Levin said.

“Troxphen is a combination of ingredients, as well as testosterone being the major one. It’s a very unique herb. It’s actually been used for hundreds of years for sexual function purposes to treat maladies and pre-adiabatic,” Levin said.

“Troxphen is a unique herb. It’s actually been used for hundreds of years for sexual function purposes to treat maladies and pre-adiabatic,” Levin said.