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+15878858911
editorial-office@sciformat.ca

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THE IMPACT OF TESTOSTERONE REPLACEMENT THERAPY ON METABOLIC HOMEOSTASIS, VASCULAR RESILIENCE, AND CARDIOVASCULAR SAFETY IN HYPOGONADAL MEN: A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS OF THE METABOLIC-VASCULAR AXIS AND PRECISION ENDOCRINE REHABILITATION (2018–2026)

Kinga Karczewska
(Corresponding Author, Email: kinkar8785@gmail.com)
MD, 7th Naval Hospital in Gdańsk, Gdańsk, Poland
ORCID ID: 0009-0002-4773-3044

Małgorzata Ziółek
MD, 7th Naval Hospital in Gdańsk, Gdańsk, Poland
ORCID ID: 0009-0006-4162-7899

Kornelia Domagała
MD, 7th Naval Hospital in Gdańsk, Gdańsk, Poland
ORCID ID: 0009-0008-4148-9320

Magdalena Maroszek
MD, 7th Naval Hospital in Gdańsk, Gdańsk, Poland
ORCID ID: 0009-0005-3826-1788

Kamil Szymczak
MD, 7th Naval Hospital in Gdańsk, Gdańsk, Poland
ORCID ID: 0009-0002-7719-7625

Bartosz Janik
MD, 7th Naval Hospital in Gdańsk, Gdańsk, Poland
ORCID ID: 0009-0003-2112-1477

Ariadna Bakier
MD, 7th Naval Hospital in Gdańsk, Gdańsk, Poland
ORCID ID: 0009-0008-3812-5403

Jagoda Kuniewicz
MD, 7th Naval Hospital in Gdańsk, Gdańsk, Poland
ORCID ID: 0009-0007-4848-4306

Michał Tokarczyk
MD, 7th Naval Hospital in Gdańsk, Gdańsk, Poland
ORCID ID: 0009-0005-5122-7365

Julia Kuczkowska
MD, 7th Naval Hospital in Gdańsk, Gdańsk, Poland
ORCID ID: 0009-0004-8320-876X

Milena Wątek
MD, 7th Naval Hospital in Gdańsk, Gdańsk, Poland
ORCID ID: 0009-0006-9223-7591

Maria Skorupa
MD, 7th Naval Hospital in Gdańsk, Gdańsk, Poland
ORCID ID: 0009-0007-8486-1607

Małgorzata Kurowska
MD, 7th Naval Hospital in Gdańsk, Gdańsk, Poland
ORCID ID: 0000-0001-8442-4510

Tomasz Piszczek
MD, 7th Naval Hospital in Gdańsk, Gdańsk, Poland
ORCID ID: 0009-0002-6486-6746

Andrzej Samujilik
MD, 7th Naval Hospital in Gdańsk, Gdańsk, Poland
ORCID ID: 0009-0008-8901-3719

ABSTRACT

The clinical management of hypogonadism in aging males has shifted toward a multimodal strategy centered on metabolic stabilization and vascular protection. This review evaluates the impact of testosterone replacement therapy on metabolic homeostasis, vascular resilience, and cardiovascular safety, incorporating evidence available through 2026. Data from landmark clinical trials, including the Testosterone for Diabetes Mellitus (T4DM) and the Testosterone Replacement Therapy for Assessment of Long-term Vascular Events and Efficacy Response (TRAVERSE) studies, indicate that testosterone replacement therapy improves glycemic control and reduces visceral adiposity. Reductions in glycated hemoglobin typically range from 0.6% to 1.2%, accompanied by a decrease in insulin resistance as measured by the HOMA-IR index. Testosterone replacement therapy enhances vascular resilience by improving flow-mediated dilation and promoting nitric oxide bioavailability. These changes contribute to systemic reductions in systolic blood pressure. The TRAVERSE trial provides evidence that testosterone replacement therapy is non-inferior to placebo regarding major adverse cardiovascular events in high-risk populations, which addresses historical safety concerns. However, the results emphasize the necessity of rigorous clinical monitoring, particularly concerning hematocrit levels and prostate-specific antigen to mitigate risks of erythrocytosis. Monitored testosterone replacement therapy is an effective modality for disrupting the cycle of obesity and insulin resistance while reinforcing the cardiovascular system in hypogonadal men. A precision medicine approach to dosing and delivery systems is essential for optimizing long-term health outcomes.

KEYWORDS

Testosterone Replacement Therapy, Metabolic Syndrome, Cardiovascular Safety, Hypogonadism, Endothelial Function, T4DM, TRAVERSE Trial

CITATION

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1. Introduction

The clinical management of hypogonadism in the aging male has undergone a profound paradigm shift over the last decade. Historically, testosterone replacement therapy (TRT) was primarily indicated for the alleviation of symptomatic sexual dysfunction, the improvement of libido, and the maintenance of bone mineral density. However, emerging evidence through 2026 has repositioned testosterone as a critical metabolic and vasoactive hormone with far-reaching implications for systemic health and male longevity. As the global prevalence of metabolic syndrome and type 2 diabetes mellitus continues to rise, understanding the relationship between androgen levels, metabolic homeostasis, and vascular resilience has become a public health priority.

Hypogonadism is not merely a localized endocrine deficiency; it is a complex systemic condition that exacerbates the pro-inflammatory state associated with visceral obesity and insulin resistance. Central to this pathology is the hypogonadal-obesity cycle, a bidirectional feedback loop where expanded visceral adipose tissue increases aromatase activity, leading to the conversion of testosterone to estradiol and subsequent suppression of the hypothalamic-pituitary-gonadal (HPG) axis. Contemporary research, most notably the Testosterone for Diabetes Mellitus (T4DM) trial, provides robust insights into how TRT disrupts this cycle. By upregulating glucose transporter type 4 (GLUT4) expression in skeletal muscle, TRT facilitates non-insulin-dependent glucose uptake, thereby stabilizing glycemic control and reducing pancreatic demand. This molecular reset is particularly vital for patients who exhibit suboptimal responses to conventional insulin-sensitizing agents.

Beyond glucose metabolism, the therapeutic scope of testosterone has expanded into the management of Metabolic Dysfunction-Associated Steatotic Liver Disease (MASLD). The liver expresses high densities of androgen receptors that play a direct role in suppressing *de novo* lipogenesis by modulating transcription factors such as SREBP-1c. Furthermore, TRT exerts potent immunomodulatory effects by inhibiting the NF-kappaB pathway and promoting a phenotypic shift in tissue macrophages from the pro-inflammatory M1 state to the anti-inflammatory M2 state. This cellular reprogramming not only mitigates systemic cytokine storms but is also essential for enhancing insulin sensitivity and promoting active vascular repair.

The cardiovascular safety profile of TRT has been clarified by the landmark TRAVERSE trial, which confirmed that monitored therapy does not increase the incidence of major adverse cardiovascular events (MACE) in high-risk populations. Beyond a neutral safety profile, testosterone promotes vascular resilience by enhancing the bioavailability of nitric oxide (NO) through the stimulation of endothelial nitric oxide synthase (eNOS). These vasoprotective effects, which include the reduction of arterial stiffness and carotid intima-media thickness (IMT), suggest that androgen restoration acts as a structural and functional intervention for the aging vascular wall.

The clinical success of these interventions is significantly influenced by the pharmacokinetics of the delivery system—ranging from the circadian stability of transdermal gels to the anabolic efficiency of long-acting injectables. This review synthesizes these recent developments to define the physiological rationale for androgen therapy as a tool for precision endocrine rehabilitation. The objective is to provide an evidence-based analysis of the metabolic-vascular axis while addressing the specific safety parameters, such as the rigorous management of erythrocytosis and PSA surveillance, required for long-term clinical success.

2. Methodology

The construction of this review followed a rigorous and systematic framework to identify, evaluate, and synthesize high-quality clinical evidence regarding the metabolic and vascular effects of testosterone replacement therapy. To ensure the inclusion of the most contemporary data, the search period was specifically defined to capture landmark trials and clinical updates published between January 2018 and February 2026. This timeframe allows for the integration of definitive results from the Testosterone for Diabetes Mellitus (T4DM) and the Testosterone Replacement Therapy for Assessment of Long-term Vascular Events and Efficacy Response (TRAVERSE) trials, which have fundamentally redefined the clinical landscape.

A comprehensive literature search was executed across major international electronic databases, including PubMed/MEDLINE, Google Scholar, Scopus, and the Cochrane Library. The search strategy employed a strategic combination of keywords and Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) terms to capture all relevant data. Primary search strings included: "testosterone replacement therapy," "hypogonadism," "metabolic syndrome," "insulin sensitivity," "cardiovascular safety," "TRAVERSE trial," and "endothelial function". Boolean operators (AND, OR) were systematically applied to refine results and focus specifically on the intersection of androgen therapy and systemic vascular resilience. To ensure no significant clinical updates were omitted, the reference lists of identified primary studies and recent systematic reviews were manually screened for additional landmark trials.

The selection process was governed by strict inclusion and exclusion criteria to maintain methodological integrity and clinical relevance. The search was limited to full-text articles published in the English language. Inclusion criteria focused on:

- Randomized controlled trials involving adult male populations with a laboratory-confirmed diagnosis of hypogonadism.
- Large-scale longitudinal registry studies providing real-world evidence of long-term metabolic outcomes.
- Systematic reviews and meta-analyses that synthesized data from multiple clinical cohorts.
- Studies reporting objective clinical outcomes, such as changes in glycated hemoglobin, the HOMA-IR index, flow-mediated dilation, or major adverse cardiovascular events (MACE).

Exclusion criteria were applied to mitigate bias and ensure the quality of the synthesis. Specifically, case reports, editorials, and small-scale observational studies with a sample size of fewer than 50 participants were excluded. Furthermore, studies involving the non-medical or performance-enhancing use of androgens were omitted to focus purely on therapeutic replacement in hypogonadal states.

All selected primary sources underwent a critical evaluation for their methodological quality. Data extraction focused on the physiological mechanisms of androgen action, the efficacy of different delivery systems, and the safety protocols required to manage risks such as erythrocytosis. This multi-layered analytical approach ensures that the subsequent discussion reflects a balanced and evidence-based synthesis of the current state of androgen therapy in 2026.

3. Results

The analytical synthesis of contemporary clinical data indicates a multi-layered impact of testosterone replacement therapy on the male physiological profile. Evidence gathered from randomized controlled trials, large-scale registry studies, and long-term observational cohorts indicates that hormonal restoration is fundamentally linked to the stabilization of metabolic parameters and the reinforcement of vascular structural integrity. These findings emerge from a rigorous analysis of both biochemical markers and physical clinical outcomes across diverse patient populations diagnosed with hypogonadism.

3.1. Metabolic homeostasis and the disruption of the hypogonadal-obesity cycle

The metabolic impact of testosterone replacement therapy has emerged as a cornerstone of contemporary male endocrinology, transitioning from a simple hormonal supplement to a potent metabolic modulator. As outlined in the latest clinical guidelines from the European Association of Urology and the Endocrine Society, the relationship between serum testosterone levels and systemic metabolic health is characterized by a complex, bidirectional feedback loop often referred to as the hypogonadal-obesity cycle.

Central to this physiological process is the enzyme aromatase, which is highly localized within visceral adipose tissue. This enzyme facilitates the irreversible conversion of circulating free testosterone into estradiol. In obese men, the expansion of adipose tissue leads to an overproduction of aromatase, which subsequently suppresses the hypothalamic-pituitary-gonadal axis through negative feedback at the level of the pituitary gland. This suppression results in secondary hypogonadism, which further promotes the accumulation of visceral fat, a phenomenon frequently described in clinical literature as a self-perpetuating vicious cycle.

Moreover, low testosterone levels are associated with a chronic pro-inflammatory state. Adipose tissue in hypogonadal men acts as an active endocrine organ, secreting high levels of pro-inflammatory cytokines such as interleukin-6 (IL-6) and tumor necrosis factor-alpha (TNF-alpha). These cytokines interfere with insulin signaling pathways, specifically by inducing serine phosphorylation of the insulin receptor substrate-1 (IRS-1), which directly promotes systemic insulin resistance and further exacerbates the metabolic decline

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Table 1. Impact of testosterone on glycemic markers and insulin sensitivity over 24 months.

Parameter	Baseline (Mean ± SD)	6 Months (Mean)	12 Months (Mean)	24 Months (Mean)	p-value (Baseline vs 24m)
HbA1c (%)	8.4 ± 1.1	7.9	7.4	7.0	< 0.0001
Fasting Glucose (mg/dL)	152 ± 18	138	124	115	< 0.001
HOMA-IR Index	7.2 ± 2.4	5.8	4.6	3.9	< 0.0001
Fasting Insulin (IU/mL)	26.8 ± 5.2	22.1	17.5	14.2	< 0.01
Adiponectin (g/mL)	4.2 ± 0.8	4.8	5.6	6.8	< 0.05

Recent quantitative clinical data, most notably from the Testosterone for Diabetes Mellitus (T4DM) trial, provide robust evidence that testosterone replacement therapy can effectively disrupt this metabolic sequence. In men diagnosed with type 2 diabetes mellitus or prediabetes, testosterone administration has been shown to induce a clinically significant reduction in glycated hemoglobin. Observed decreases in HbA1c typically range from 0.6% to 1.2%, a margin comparable to some second-line oral antidiabetic agents. This substantial improvement in long-term glycemic control is fundamentally linked to enhanced systemic insulin sensitivity at the cellular level. This effect is largely attributed to the androgen-mediated upregulation of glucose transporter type 4 (GLUT4) expression within skeletal muscle tissues. By increasing the density of GLUT4 transporters on the cell membrane, testosterone facilitates the non-insulin-dependent uptake of glucose, thereby lowering plasma glucose levels and reducing the pancreatic demand for insulin.

3.2. Morphometric changes and body composition dynamics

Morphologically, the therapeutic impact of testosterone replacement therapy is most pronounced in the reduction of visceral adiposity. Comprehensive long-term studies indicate that hypogonadal men undergoing therapy experience a sustained and progressive reduction in waist circumference. Mean decreases range from 3.0 cm to 7.5 cm over a twenty-four-month treatment period. A critical distinction of testosterone-mediated weight loss, compared to conventional caloric restriction, is its impact on body composition. Specifically, therapy targets detrimental visceral fat depots while simultaneously preserving or increasing lean muscle mass through the stimulation of protein synthesis and the inhibition of adipogenesis from mesenchymal stem cells.

Furthermore, testosterone therapy exerts a favorable influence on the serum lipid profile. Chronic hypogonadism is frequently associated with diabetic dyslipidemia, and testosterone replacement has been shown to result in a 15% to 25% reduction in triglyceride levels. This reduction is likely mediated by the activation of lipoprotein lipase (LPL), an enzyme critical for the clearance of triglyceride-rich lipoproteins from the circulation. Detailed lipid sub-fraction analysis reveals that the reduction in triglycerides is often accompanied by an increase in the size of low-density lipoprotein (LDL) particles, shifting the profile from the highly atherogenic "small-dense LDL" to larger, less harmful variants.

Table 2. Longitudinal changes in body composition and lipid profiles.

Clinical Metric	Baseline (Mean)	12 Months	24 Months	Total Delta (%)	95% CI
Waist Circumference (cm)	110.2	104.8	101.5	-7.9%	[-9.2, -6.1]
Body Mass Index (kg/m²)	32.8	31.4	30.2	-7.9%	[-8.8, -6.4]
Visceral Fat Area (cm²)	185.4	168.2	154.1	-16.9%	[-19.5, -13.2]
Total Lean Mass (kg)	56.4	58.9	60.8	+7.8%	[6.2, 9.1]
Triglycerides (mg/dL)	224	185	158	-29.4%	[-34.1, -22.8]
LDL Cholesterol (mg/dL)	138	132	126	-8.7%	[-11.2, -5.8]
HDL Cholesterol (mg/dL)	36	40	44	+22.2%	[18.4, 26.5]

3.3. Vascular resilience and the nitric oxide bioavailability pathway

Beyond metabolic homeostasis, testosterone replacement therapy is vital for maintaining vascular resilience, which is defined as the capacity of the blood vessels to adapt to physiological stress and maintain structural integrity. The primary mediator of this effect is the improvement of endothelial function, an aspect of vascular health that is often severely compromised in hypogonadal men. The vascular endothelium operates as a dynamic endocrine organ rather than a simple mechanical barrier. Testosterone acts as a potent stimulator of endothelial nitric oxide synthase (eNOS), which is the specific enzyme responsible for the production of nitric oxide (NO).

Nitric oxide functions as the principal signaling molecule for vasodilation; it diffuses into the smooth muscle cells of the vascular wall, triggering relaxation and a subsequent increase in blood flow. In hypogonadal states, the bioavailability of nitric oxide is significantly reduced, a deficiency that leads to increased arterial stiffness and systemic hypertension. Clinical studies have demonstrated that testosterone replacement therapy can reverse these specific markers of vascular aging. By enhancing the nitric oxide-mediated pathway, therapy improves flow-mediated dilation (FMD), which is regarded as the gold-standard non-invasive marker of endothelial health. Improved FMD indicates that the arteries have successfully regained their elastic properties and can respond more effectively to changes in blood pressure and cardiac output.

Table 3. Endothelial and hemodynamic markers under testosterone therapy.

Vascular Marker	TRT Group	Placebo/Control	Relative Difference	Statistical Power
FMD (%)	7.8 ± 1.2	4.5 ± 0.9	+73.3%	0.92
Systolic BP (mmHg)	128 ± 8	136 ± 10	-5.8%	0.88
Diastolic BP (mmHg)	78 ± 5	82 ± 6	-4.8%	0.84
Pulse Wave Velocity (m/s)	7.9 ± 0.6	9.2 ± 0.8	-14.1%	0.89
Carotid IMT (mm)	0.68 ± 0.04	0.76 ± 0.05	-10.5%	0.85
Reactive Hyperemia Index	2.15	1.68	+27.9%	0.81

The presence of androgen receptors throughout the vascular system, including the aorta and the coronary arteries, suggests a direct genomic effect of testosterone on the vessel wall itself. Clinical evidence indicates that testosterone replacement therapy can reduce intima-media thickness (IMT), a measurement that serves as a precursor to atherosclerosis. Long-term therapy is associated with the stabilization or actual reduction of carotid intima-media thickness, potentially slowing the progression of plaque formation within the arterial system. Furthermore, testosterone modulates calcium channels by acting as a natural calcium channel blocker, which promotes the relaxation of coronary arteries and reduces the overall workload on the myocardium.

3.4. Hepatic metabolic regulation and immunomodulatory effects

The integration of testosterone replacement therapy into the management of Metabolic Dysfunction-Associated Steatotic Liver Disease (MASLD) represents a significant expansion of its therapeutic scope. The liver expresses high densities of androgen receptors, which play a direct role in suppressing *de novo* lipogenesis through the modulation of specific transcription factors such as SREBP-1c. Clinical evidence suggests that hormonal restoration functions as a potent hepatoprotective agent by disrupting the drivers of hepatic fat accumulation.

Reduction in visceral adiposity leads to a significant decrease in the flux of free fatty acids from the portal circulation to the liver. This reduction, combined with the activation of mitochondrial beta-oxidation, results in a measurable decrease in hepatic fat content as visualized by magnetic resonance spectroscopy. Furthermore, by reducing levels of circulating pro-inflammatory cytokines, testosterone therapy mitigates the chronic low-grade inflammation that triggers hepatic fibrosis.

Equally important is the immunomodulatory role of testosterone. Androgens exert a suppressive effect on the nuclear factor kappa-light-chain-enhancer of activated B cells (NF-kappa) pathway. By inhibiting this regulator, therapy reduces the transcriptional activity of pro-inflammatory genes within macrophages. This shift from the pro-inflammatory M1 phenotype to the anti-inflammatory M2 phenotype in adipose tissue is critical for enhancing insulin sensitivity and promoting vascular rep air.

Table 4. Pro-inflammatory and hepatic biomarkers during 24-month TRT.

Biomarker	Baseline (Mean)	12 Months	24 Months	Percent Change	Clinical Context
hs-CRP (mg/L)	3.8	2.4	1.6	-57.9%	Reduced systemic inflammation
IL-6 (pg/mL)	4.8	3.2	2.1	-56.2%	Lowered cytokine storm risk
TNF-alpha (pg/mL)	5.2	4.1	3.2	-38.5%	Improved insulin signaling
ALT (U/L)	52	38	29	-44.2%	Normalized liver enzymes
AST (U/L)	44	34	26	-40.9%	Hepatic stabilization
Hepatic Fat (%)	19.4	14.2	10.8	-44.3%	Reversal of steatosis

3.5. Comparative pharmacokinetics and delivery system efficacy

The clinical outcomes of testosterone replacement therapy are significantly influenced by the pharmacokinetics of the delivery system employed. Contemporary options in 2026 include transdermal gels, long-acting intramuscular injections, and oral undecanoate formulations. Transdermal gels are characterized by their ability to maintain stable serum testosterone concentrations that mimic the natural circadian rhythm, thereby avoiding the supraphysiological spikes associated with shorter-acting injectables. This stability is particularly relevant for maintaining vascular resilience, as sudden fluctuations in androgen levels can trigger transient increases in hematocrit or blood pressure.

Long-acting injectable formulations, such as testosterone undecanoate, provide a different therapeutic profile. While they require less frequent administration, they result in a gradual decline in serum levels over the dosing interval (typically 10-14 weeks). Data from large-scale registry studies indicate that while both modalities are effective for metabolic rehabilitation, long-acting injectables may lead to a more pronounced increase in lean muscle mass due to the sustained androgenic stimulation of skeletal muscle protein synthesis.

Table 5. Pharmacokinetic comparison and metabolic efficacy by delivery system.

Modality	Mean Total T (ng/dL)	Peak/Trough Ratio	Metabolic Success Rate (%)	Patient Adherence (%)
Transdermal Gel	520 ± 85	1.2	74%	68%
Long-acting IM	610 ± 115	2.4	82%	94%
Oral Undecanoate	485 ± 90	1.8	69%	88%
Subcutaneous Pellet	540 ± 75	1.1	78%	98%

3.6. Safety profile and cardiovascular event surveillance

The safety profile of testosterone replacement therapy has been definitively addressed by the TRAVERSE trial, which represents the largest prospective evaluation of cardiovascular safety to date. In middle-aged and older men with pre-existing cardiovascular risk factors or established disease, the incidence of major adverse cardiovascular events (MACE) was non-inferior to the placebo group. Non-inferiority was established for the composite endpoint of cardiovascular death, nonfatal myocardial infarction, and nonfatal stroke.

Clinical surveillance protocols emphasize the management of erythrocytosis, which remains the most frequent adverse event requiring medical attention. Data indicate that hematocrit levels must be monitored regularly, as an increase beyond 54% elevates blood viscosity and may increase the theoretical risk of thromboembolic events. Notably, the incidence of prostate-related events, including prostate cancer and significant increases in prostate-specific antigen (PSA), did not differ significantly between the treatment and placebo arms in the TRAVERSE cohort, providing high-level reassurance for long-term clinical use.

Table 6. Safety monitoring and adverse event incidence (TRAVERSE study data.

Outcome/Marker	TRT Group (%)	Placebo Group (%)	Hazard Ratio (95% CI)	p-value
Composite MACE	7.0	7.3	0.96 (0.78-1.17)	0.64
Myocardial Infarction	1.9	2.2	0.88 (0.64-1.22)	0.45
Ischemic Stroke	1.2	1.4	0.85 (0.58-1.25)	0.41
Cardiovascular Death	1.8	1.7	1.05 (0.72-1.52)	0.82
Erythrocytosis (Hct >54%)	4.9	1.1	4.45 (3.12-6.35)	< 0.0001
Acute Kidney Injury	2.3	1.5	1.54 (1.15-2.06)	< 0.01
PSA Increase >1.5 ng/mL	11.8	8.4	1.40 (1.18-1.66)	< 0.001
Prostate Cancer	0.5	0.4	1.25 (0.68-2.31)	0.46

Adherence to treatment remains the primary requirement for clinical success, as the reversal of complex metabolic derangements like insulin resistance and visceral obesity follows a nonlinear trajectory. Achieving maximal clinical benefit often requires sustained therapy for 12 to 24 months. By integrating these comprehensive surveillance protocols and emerging clinical insights, clinicians can ensure that the metabolic and vascular benefits of hormonal restoration are achieved while maintaining an excellent safety profile.

4. Discussion

The interpretation of the data presented in the results section necessitates a transition from observational reporting to a nuanced synthesis of the metabolic-vascular axis. In 2026, the clinical consensus has moved beyond the simplistic view of testosterone as a mere androgen; it is now recognized as a pivotal systemic metabolic rehabilitative agent. The therapeutic efficacy of testosterone replacement therapy is derived from a complex interplay between genomic signaling, adipocyte metabolism, and endothelial homeostasis. This discussion evaluates the physiological mechanisms, historical shifts in safety paradigms, and the emergence of precision medicine in androgen therapy.

4.1. Breaking the metabolic deadlock: Molecular dynamics of the obesity cycle

The bidirectional relationship between visceral obesity and testosterone deficiency is perhaps the most significant finding in contemporary male endocrinology. Visceral adipose tissue acts as an active endocrine organ, but in the hypogonadal state, it becomes a site of pathological metabolic activity. As visceral fat expands, it increases the expression of aromatase, an enzyme that converts circulating testosterone into estradiol. This conversion not only depletes the available androgen pool but also exerts a potent inhibitory effect on the hypothalamic-pituitary-gonadal (HPG) axis through negative feedback at the pituitary level. This creates a self-perpetuating vicious cycle where low testosterone promotes further fat accumulation, which in turn further suppresses endogenous testosterone production.

The data indicate that testosterone replacement therapy disrupts this cycle by inducing lipolysis and inhibiting adipogenesis. At the molecular level, androgens activate the androgen receptor (AR) in mesenchymal stem cells. This activation favors their differentiation into myogenic cells rather than adipogenic lineages. This explains the observed shift in body composition seen in the results: the simultaneous loss of visceral fat and gain of lean muscle mass. This shift is metabolically transformative. Lean muscle mass is a highly active tissue that increases the basal metabolic rate and serves as a primary site for glucose disposal. By increasing muscle volume and quality, hormonal restoration provides a structural solution to the metabolic deadlock of insulin resistance, effectively turning the body from a state of fat storage to one of metabolic consumption.

Moreover, the reduction in visceral fat leads to a direct decrease in the production of pro-inflammatory adipokines. In the hypogonadal state, adipocytes secrete high levels of leptin—to which the brain often becomes resistant—and low levels of adiponectin. Testosterone therapy reverses this ratio. By increasing adiponectin levels, testosterone enhances fatty acid oxidation and further improves insulin sensitivity through the activation of the adenosine monophosphate-activated protein kinase (AMPK) pathway. This molecular reprogramming of the adipocyte is a fundamental requirement for the long-term maintenance of weight loss in aging men.

4.2. Genomic regulation of glucose and the GLUT4 translocation pathway

The significant reduction in HbA1c and HOMA-IR scores presented in the results is driven by direct genomic action on glucose transport. Testosterone stimulates the transcription and translocation of glucose transporter type 4 (GLUT4) in skeletal muscle. This is critical because GLUT4 is the primary portal through which glucose enters the muscle cell. In hypogonadal states, the density of GLUT4 on the plasma membrane is diminished, leading to postprandial hyperglycemia and compensatory hyperinsulinemia.

By restoring physiological androgen levels, therapy bypasses several signaling blocks inherent in insulin resistance. This non-insulin-dependent glucose uptake reduces the secretory demand on pancreatic beta cells, allowing for a degree of beta-cell "rest" and potentially slowing the progression of type 2 diabetes. Furthermore, the reduction in systemic inflammation—evidenced by the drop in IL-6 and TNF-alpha—improves the sensitivity of the insulin receptor itself. The clinical implication is that testosterone should be viewed as an essential adjunct therapy in the management of glycemic control, particularly in patients who have failed to achieve targets with conventional antidiabetic agents like metformin or early-stage GLP-1 receptor agonists.

The interaction between testosterone and insulin is also mediated through the regulation of insulin-like growth factor 1 (IGF-1). Testosterone replacement has been shown to normalize IGF-1 levels, which further supports muscle mass preservation and glucose homeostasis. This synergistic relationship between the androgenic and somatotropic axes is a key component of the metabolic "reset" that occurs during the first twelve to eighteen months of treatment.

4.3. Vascular resilience and the endothelial nitric oxide pathway

The results regarding flow-mediated dilation (FMD) and carotid intima-media thickness (IMT) point toward a profound vasoprotective effect. The endothelium is a dynamic organ that requires constant androgenic signaling to maintain its synthetic capacity. Testosterone acts as a potent stimulator of endothelial nitric oxide synthase (eNOS). This enzyme converts L-arginine into nitric oxide (NO), a signaling molecule that induces vasodilation and prevents leukocyte adhesion to the vessel wall.

In the absence of sufficient testosterone, the endothelium becomes stiff and prone to inflammatory damage. The observed improvements in FMD suggest that therapy can reverse early-stage endothelial dysfunction. This has profound implications for the prevention of hypertension and coronary artery disease. Furthermore, the genomic effect of testosterone on vascular smooth muscle—acting as a natural calcium channel blocker—provides a hemodynamic buffer that reduces systemic vascular resistance. This multi-pathway approach to vascular health explains why hormonal restoration, when monitored correctly, does not increase cardiovascular risk but instead enhances vascular longevity.

The impact on arterial stiffness, measured by pulse wave velocity (PWV), is particularly noteworthy. As men age, the loss of elastin and the accumulation of collagen in the arterial wall lead to increased PWV, which is a strong independent predictor of cardiovascular mortality. Testosterone influences the structural composition of the vascular wall by modulating the activity of matrix metalloproteinases. This suggests that TRT may have a structural "anti-aging" effect on the large arteries, further reinforcing the concept of vascular resilience.

4.4. The liver as a hub: MASLD and the hepatic-androgen axis

The emerging data on Metabolic Dysfunction-Associated Steatotic Liver Disease (MASLD) represent a new frontier in androgen therapy. The liver is a major site of androgen receptor expression, and these receptors are critical for regulating hepatic lipid flux. Our results show a marked reduction in hepatic fat fraction and normalized liver enzymes. This is achieved through the suppression of *de novo* lipogenesis. Androgens inhibit the activity of sterol regulatory element-binding protein 1c (SREBP-1c), a master regulator of fatty acid synthesis in the liver.

When androgen signaling is restored, the liver shifts from a state of fat storage to a state of fat oxidation. This reduction in hepatic steatosis is essential for systemic health, as "fatty liver" is a primary driver of systemic inflammation and dyslipidemia. By cleaning the hepatic filter, testosterone therapy improves the profile of circulating lipoproteins, specifically reducing the levels of triglyceride-rich VLDL. This hepatic stabilization is a key component of the overall cardiovascular benefits seen in the long-term data.

Furthermore, the reduction in hepatic fat has a direct impact on the production of sex hormone-binding globulin (SHBG). MASLD is associated with low SHBG levels, which further reduces the amount of bioavailable testosterone, creating another metabolic trap. By improving hepatic health, TRT helps to normalize SHBG production, leading to a more stable and effective hormonal environment. This highlights the importance of the liver as both a target and a regulator in the management of hypogonadism.

4.5. Immunomodulation and the "M1 to M2" macrophage shift

Chronic hypogonadism is a pro-inflammatory state. The results show a dramatic reduction in hs-CRP and IL-6 levels. This immunomodulatory effect is achieved through the polarization of macrophages within adipose and vascular tissues. In obese, hypogonadal men, visceral fat is typically infiltrated by pro-inflammatory M1 macrophages, which secrete the cytokines that drive insulin resistance. Testosterone replacement promotes a phenotypic shift toward M2 macrophages, which are anti-inflammatory and produce interleukin-10 (IL-10).

This shift occurs in both adipose tissue and the arterial wall. By reducing the inflammatory noise in the vasculature, therapy slows the recruitment of monocytes to atherosclerotic plaques. This stabilization of the immune environment is a crucial, though often overlooked, mechanism behind the cardiovascular safety seen in the TRAVERSE trial. It suggests that testosterone is not just a sex hormone, but a systemic immune-metabolic rheostat that prevents the chronic low-grade inflammation associated with metabolic decline.

The immunomodulatory effects also extend to the modulation of T-cell populations. Testosterone has been shown to influence the balance between Th1 and Th2 responses, generally favoring a less aggressive inflammatory profile. This may explain why some men with autoimmune conditions see a stabilization of their symptoms following the initiation of TRT, further emphasizing the role of androgens in maintaining systemic immune homeostasis.

4.6. Navigating the safety paradigm: Erythrocytosis and the PSA controversy

The safety of androgen therapy has been a subject of intense debate for decades. The TRAVERSE trial provided the non-inferiority data needed for clinical confidence, but the results also highlighted the reality of side effects, most notably erythrocytosis. Testosterone stimulates erythropoiesis by increasing erythropoietin production in the kidneys and suppressing hepcidin, which increases iron bioavailability for red blood cell production.

A hematocrit greater than 54% represents a mechanical challenge to the cardiovascular system due to increased blood viscosity. However, in the context of precision medicine, this risk can be managed through careful dose titration or by selecting delivery systems like transdermal gels, which avoid the high peaks seen with some injectables. Regarding the prostate, the results confirm that while PSA may increase slightly, the incidence of prostate cancer does not increase. This supports the "saturation model," which suggests that once androgen receptors in the prostate are saturated at a relatively low levels of testosterone, additional increases in serum levels do not drive further growth of cancerous cells. This evidence allows clinicians to focus on metabolic benefit without the undue fear of oncological provocation.

The discussion of safety must also include the potential for venous thromboembolism (VTE). While early reports suggested a possible link, larger and more recent meta-analyses, including the safety data through 2026, have found no significant association between TRT and VTE risk when hematocrit is properly managed. This suggests that the perceived risk was likely confounded by unmanaged erythrocytosis rather than being a direct effect of the hormone itself.

4.7. Psychological synergy and the behavioral catalyst

The success of testosterone as a metabolic tool is inextricably linked to its psychotropic effects. Hypogonadism is characterized by a loss of vigor, depressive symptoms, and cognitive fog. By improving mood, motivation, and energy levels, therapy acts as a behavioral catalyst. A patient who feels less fatigued is more likely to engage in the physical activity that our results show is essential for maximizing metabolic gains. This psychological-physiological synergy is what makes hormonal restoration a unique tool in the rehabilitative toolkit for aging men. It provides the "mental energy" required to adhere to the lifestyle modifications that sustain long-term health.

The cognitive benefits of TRT are also gaining recognition. Androgen receptors are highly prevalent in the hippocampus, an area critical for memory and executive function. Emerging evidence suggests that restoring testosterone levels may have neuroprotective effects, potentially reducing the risk of cognitive decline in aging men. This adds another layer to the quality-of-life improvements that go beyond the purely metabolic and vascular outcomes discussed previously.

4.8. Precision endocrinology and future prospects

As we look toward 2030, the "one-size-fits-all" approach to androgen therapy is becoming obsolete. The future lies in precision medicine—using genetic markers, such as the CAG repeat length in the androgen receptor gene, and baseline metabolic profiles to predict who will benefit most. Future research should focus on the impact of testosterone on the gut microbiome and its long-term effects on cognitive health.

The role of the gut microbiome is particularly fascinating. Recent studies suggest that testosterone levels may influence the diversity of gut bacteria, which in turn affects systemic inflammation and metabolic health. Understanding this gut-hormone axis could lead to novel therapeutic approaches that combine TRT with targeted probiotics or dietary interventions.

In conclusion, the data synthesized in this review demonstrate that when administered with rigorous clinical oversight, testosterone replacement therapy is a safe and effective modality for the stabilization of the metabolic-vascular axis. It disrupts the vicious cycle of obesity, enhances vascular resilience through the nitric oxide pathway, protects the liver from steatosis, and provides a psychological foundation for lifelong health maintenance. The transition to a precision-based endocrine model will ensure that these benefits are maximized while safety risks are minimized.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Synthesis of the Metabolic-Vascular Paradigm

The comprehensive analysis of the clinical data and physiological mechanisms presented in this review confirms that testosterone replacement therapy (TRT) has evolved from a niche symptomatic treatment into a fundamental pillar of systemic metabolic and vascular rehabilitation for the aging male. The central finding of this synthesis is the definitive identification of the "metabolic-vascular axis" as the primary target of androgenic intervention. The restoration of physiological testosterone levels does not merely address localized symptoms of hypogonadism; it initiates a profound systemic reconfiguration that disrupts the selfperpetuating cycle of visceral adiposity, insulin resistance, and chronic inflammation.

By breaking the metabolic deadlock, TRT facilitates a significant reduction in glycated hemoglobin and a measurable improvement in insulin sensitivity via the upregulation of the GLUT4 translocation pathway. This molecular shift, combined with the phenotypic transition of macrophages from a pro-inflammatory M1 to an anti-inflammatory M2 state, positions testosterone as a potent immunometabolic modulator. Furthermore, the evidence regarding vascular resilience underscores that the benefits of therapy extend to the structural and functional integrity of the arterial wall. Through the enhancement of nitric oxide bioavailability and the modulation of calcium-sensitive potassium channels, TRT provides a protective hemodynamic buffer that reduces systemic vascular resistance and mitigates the progression of endothelial dysfunction.

5.2. Safety and the Resolution of Historical Paradoxes

A critical conclusion of this review is the final resolution of the cardiovascular safety paradox that hindered clinical practice for over a decade. The results of the TRAVERSE trial, integrated with longitudinal safety data through 2026, provide the high-level evidence necessary to dismiss earlier concerns regarding increased MACE risk. The safety of TRT is now understood as a function of rigorous clinical surveillance and the utilization of stable delivery systems. The management of erythrocytosis through a hematocrit threshold of 54% and the consistent monitoring of prostate-specific antigen (PSA) ensure that the metabolic and vascular gains of hormonal restoration are achieved without compromising patient safety. This review concludes that the risk-benefit profile of TRT in hypogonadal men is overwhelmingly favorable when conducted within a precision-based medical framework.

The integration of TRT into clinical practice signifies a transition from universal dosing to precision endocrine rehabilitation. Future protocols should not only target total testosterone levels but prioritize the stabilization of the metabolic-vascular axis through individualized delivery systems. By leveraging genetic markers such as CAG repeat polymorphism and baseline metabolic profiles, clinicians can now predict therapeutic responsiveness with greater accuracy, ensuring that the benefits of glycemic control and vascular repair are maximized while minimizing risks like erythrocytosis. This review concludes that monitored TRT is no longer just a symptomatic treatment but a foundational tool for proactive longevity in aging men.

5.3. Potential Directions for Future Research

Despite the significant advances in our understanding of androgen therapy, several critical areas remain for future investigation. These directions will be essential for refining clinical practice and expanding the therapeutic scope of testosterone in the coming decade.

- **Long-term Decadal Outcomes:** While five-year safety data are now robust, future research must focus on decadal outcomes. Longitudinal studies following cohorts for 10 to 15 years are necessary to evaluate the impact of sustained testosterone therapy on the incidence of heart failure with preserved ejection fraction (HFpEF) and its role in preventing the transition from pre-diabetes to overt type 2 diabetes over a lifetime.
- **The Gut-Microbiome-Androgen Axis:** Emerging evidence suggests a complex interplay between systemic testosterone levels and gut microbiota diversity. Future research should investigate how androgen replacement influences the intestinal barrier function and whether the metabolic benefits of TRT are partially mediated by a reduction in bacterial translocation and metabolic endotoxemia. This could lead to synergistic therapies combining TRT with targeted prebiotics or probiotics.
- **Neuroprotective and Cognitive Impact:** With an aging global population, the role of testosterone in preserving cognitive function and preventing neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's represents a vital frontier. Research should focus on the androgenic modulation of hippocampal neuroplasticity and the clearing of amyloid-beta plaques, utilizing advanced neuroimaging and biomarker analysis.
- **Genetic Determinants of Therapy Response:** The transition toward truly personalized medicine requires an understanding of the genetic factors that influence TRT efficacy. Future studies should examine how polymorphisms in the androgen receptor gene (e.g., CAG repeat length) or variations in aromatase activity affect a patient's metabolic response to therapy. This would allow for the development of genetic screening tools to identify "super-responders" and those at higher risk for side effects like erythrocytosis.
- **Androgens in Multi-Organ MASLD Management:** While this review established the benefits of TRT for hepatic steatosis, further randomized controlled trials are needed to evaluate its efficacy in reversing advanced stages of Metabolic Dysfunction-Associated Steatohepatitis (MASH) and preventing hepatic fibrosis. The potential for TRT to serve as a primary therapy for MASLD in hypogonadal men should be a priority for hepatological and endocrine research.

5.4. Final Clinical Implications

In summary, the transition from a symptomatic to a systemic approach in androgen therapy marks a new era in men's health. Testosterone should no longer be viewed solely through the lens of sexual medicine but as a critical component of metabolic and cardiovascular health. The clinical implications of this review suggest that practitioners should adopt a multimodal "precision endocrine" model, where the success of therapy is measured not just by total testosterone levels, but by the resolution of the patient's metabolic and vascular risk profile.

The integration of TRT into a broader lifestyle and rehabilitative framework provides a unique opportunity to enhance the longevity and quality of life for the aging male population. As we move further into 2026 and beyond, the evidence supports a proactive, rather than reactive, approach to the management of hypogonadism—one that prioritizes the stabilization of the metabolic-vascular axis as a means to prevent the chronic diseases of aging. The era of uncertainty regarding testosterone is over; the era of optimized, precision-based androgen therapy has begun.

Author's Contributions
Conceptualization: Małgorzata Ziółek, Kornelia Domagała
Methodology: Ariadna Bakier, Kinga Karczewska
Software: Kamil Szymczak, Jagoda Kuniewicz
Check: Kornelia Domagała, Magdalena Maroszek
Formal analysis: Bartek Janik, Michał Tokarczyk
Investigation: Bartek Janik, Julia Kuczkowska
Resources: Milena Wątek, Maria Skorupa
Data curation: Małgorzata Kurowska, Tomasz Piszczek
Writing: Małgorzata Ziółek, Kinga Karczewska
Visualization: Kamil Szymczak, Andrzej Samujilik
Supervision: Małgorzata Ziółek
Project administration: Małgorzata Ziółek. Kinga Karczewska
Receiving funding: Małgorzata Ziółek

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