

Introduction

The hirsute female is one of the unhappiest and most difficult patients with whom the physician has to deal with. The difficulty arises from the poor understanding of the conditions which enter into the causation of hirsutism in the human female as they are many and complex, and the lack of effective treatment apart from epilating and depilating agents although recently anti androgen drugs have been used with success in its treatment.

The old assumption that hirsutism is due to excessive maleness as mentioned in the oldest books of medicine appears to be a truth. Androgenic Steroids especially testosterone may be produced in excess in the hirsute female. The source of this hormone excess may be the ovary, adrenal cortex or both, the primary sources of androgens in the female, or it may be from peripheral conversion from other steroids. The condition may be due to decreased sex hormone binding globulin with the resultant increase in the free unbound physiologically active part of the hormone. Fortunately most of

the cases of hirsutism are not associated with any serious underlying endocrinal disease and these are labelled as idiopathic hirsutism.

Figures of elevated plasma testosterone in the hirsute female are variable, but endocrine investigation of these patients may give a better and more clear understanding of the underlying pathophysiology of this condition.

In this work a review of the literature concerned with the causes, diagnosis and treatment of hirsutism is given.