

## #3 Hormones

TENI life hacks are designed to provide information that we hope will make your life a little bit easier. Please remember that everyone is different and there are diverse experiences in the trans community.

### Hormones

Some trans people take hormones to help align their body with their gender identity. Hormones alter secondary sex characteristics. For trans women and trans feminine people, this usually consists of taking oestrogens and antiandrogens. For trans men and trans masculine people this usually consists of taking androgens like testosterone.

It's important to know that not all people experience using hormones the same way. If you're considering taking hormones or would like more information, please speak to a knowledgeable health professional. The information contained in this leaflet should not be considered medical advice.

### Oestrogen<sup>1</sup>

When taking oestrogen you will likely experience:

- Redistribution of body fat. More fat will appear on buttocks, hips and thighs.
- Reduction of muscle mass and strength, particularly in the upper body.
- Breast development, although this is not always certain and may take several years for effects to be seen.
- Softening of skin and skin may appear less oily.
- Less body and facial hair. Hair may appear thinner and grow more slowly.
- Reduction of sex drive can occur.

There are risks associated with taking oestrogen, such as the possibility of developing serious blood clots, increased blood pressure, elevated liver enzymes, gallstones and cardiovascular disease. Long term use of oestrogen can lead to infertility. Regular monitoring and blood work should be conducted by a health professional.

### MYTHS

Some myths about oestrogen are that:

- **Facial hair will disappear.** Unless you have never had facial hair (early stages of puberty or if you have taken blockers through your teen years), this is false.
- **Your shoe size will go down a size or two.** This has been reported to have happened to some people taking oestrogen but won't always necessarily happen. It may be a result of muscle shrinkage.

<sup>1</sup> Transgender Health Information Project: <http://transhealth.phsa.ca/medical-options/hormones/feminizing-hormones>

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## Testosterone (T)<sup>2</sup>

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When taking testosterone you will likely experience:

- Redistribution of body fat. Less fat around buttocks, hips and thighs.
- Increase in muscle mass and strength.
- Deepening of voice.
- Skin may become more oily and prone to acne.
- More facial and body hair. Male pattern baldness may develop if it runs in your family.
- Cessation of menstruation generally occurs after 2-6 months. However, it is still possible to get pregnant in certain cases.
- Clitoral growth.
- Increase in sex drive can occur.

There are risks associated with taking testosterone, such as the possibility of developing polycythemia (blood disorder), acne, androgenic alopecia (balding) and sleep apnea. Regular monitoring and blood work should be conducted by a health professional.

### MYTHS

Some myths about testosterone are that:

- **It will make you angrier.** There is no reliable evidence that says testosterone will make you angry or violent.
- **Your sex drive will heighten.** This isn't always true. Your sex drive may lessen, heighten or stay the same.
- **Taking T will make you taller.** Taking T can make you taller if it is taken during puberty or if you have taken blockers during puberty.
- **Your breasts will completely shrink away.** Testosterone will affect your body shape and reduce fatty tissue but unless you are already small-chested, T will not cause a significant difference.
- **A higher dosage of testosterone will make you transition quicker.** This may actually have opposite effects. There is an enzyme in your body called aromatase which will convert an excess amount of testosterone into oestrogen, slowing down your transition process.

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<sup>2</sup> Transgender Health Information Project: <http://transhealth.phsa.ca/medical-options/hormones/masculinizing-hormones>

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## Blockers

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If you are a teenage trans person going through puberty, you may take hormone blockers (also known as ‘puberty blockers’ or ‘puberty suppressors’) which will temporarily suppress the obvious changes to your body. Also adult assigned male at birth trans people will also take hormone blockers along with their oestrogen to block the uptake of testosterone.

### What are the effects of puberty blockers?<sup>3</sup>

If you were assigned male at birth, puberty blockers will stop or limit:

- Growth of facial and body hair
- Deepening of the voice
- Broadening of the shoulders
- Growth of Adam’s apple
- Growth of testes and penis

If you were assigned female at birth, puberty blockers will stop or limit:

- Breast development
- Broadening of the hips
- Monthly bleeding

In both cases, puberty blockers will temporarily stop or limit:

- Growth in height
- Development of sex drive
- Accumulation of calcium in the bones
- Fertility

### MYTHS

- **Suppressing puberty is irreversible.** If someone changes their mind about taking hormone blockers and stops taking them, puberty will continue from where it was stopped. You may go through puberty at a quicker rate than you would have.

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<sup>3</sup> Transgender Health Information Project: <http://transhealth.phsa.ca/medical-options/hormones/puberty-blockers>

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## General

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It's important to understand that these changes take time and are always different for everyone.

You may also take hormone blockers in the early stages of treatment with testosterone or oestrogen to interrupt the hormone production in your own body which will make the effects of the hormones you take more effective.

While taking hormones or hormone blockers, it is important to have regular check-ups with your doctor, eat sensibly and regularly exercise. Drug taking, excessive alcohol use and obesity can undermine your hormone treatment and increase risk of complications.

## MYTHS

- **Non-binary/Genderqueer/Agender people can't take hormones and are actually binary if they do.** This is completely untrue. Your gender identity is valid no matter whether you decide to transition medically or not.
- **Binary trans people have to take hormones to be valid.** Also completely untrue. Many trans people can't transition medically and many don't want to. This doesn't affect your identity and your experience is still valid.

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### For more information:

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