

FEMINIZING HORMONES

An illustration on a light purple background featuring a large blue syringe with a needle pointing upwards and to the right. The syringe has a blue plunger and a white barrel with blue markings. Surrounding the syringe are several pills: white round pills with a horizontal line, blue and white capsules, and purple and white capsules. A large, stylized blue heart shape is behind the syringe.

HORMONES



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Feminizing Hormones FAQ

Hormone therapy (HT) can help transgender and gender non-conforming people feel more comfortable in their bodies. This guide will help you understand the basics about feminizing hormone therapy and the possible risks and benefits.

1 What are hormones? What are sex hormones?

Hormones are chemicals which regulate the body's functions. Sex hormones control the development of sex characteristics.

2 What is feminizing hormone therapy (HT)?

Feminizing HT is taking medications to adjust the levels of sex hormones in your body and is used to reduce masculine features and increase feminine features.

3 What will feminizing HT not do for me?

Feminizing HT will not change your voice, your "Adam's Apple", or the bone structure of your face or body.

4 What feminizing medications will I take?

There are two main types of feminizing medications: androgen blockers and estrogen. These medications work differently and together help you look more feminine.

5 How can I decrease the risks of feminizing HT?

Healthy lifestyle habits can reduce HT risks and can include regular physical activity, reducing or removing tobacco use, eating a healthy diet, limiting alcohol use, and getting emotional and social support when you need it. Attending your monitoring visits during HT help our team stay up-to-date on your health and address any concerns you may have.

6 What about sex and fertility?

HT can affect your ability to have an erection. Your erections may be less firm and may not last as long. You will still have sexual sensation and be able to orgasm, but may not ejaculate. Your testicles may become smaller. HT can decrease or stop sperm production which can be permanent. This means that you may not be able to conceive; however, HT is not a reliable birth control method. If you want to preserve your fertility talk to your provider about options for banking sperm before you begin hormones.

What changes can I expect to see?

Everyone's body is different, so the changes seen from HT vary. Factors which can affect HT include your genetics, the age at which you begin taking hormones and your overall health. Many people notice changes within a few months of starting HT, and can expect to see the maximum effect within 2-3 years. Some changes are permanent and some may be reversible if HT is stopped.

Higher doses of HT will not necessarily make things move more quickly. Sometimes, this may actually make your body convert the excess hormones into hormones we are trying to lower, slowing or reversing the feminizing effects.

Breast Growth

You will begin to notice nipple changes and breast growth within several months of beginning hormones. You may experience tenderness as your breasts are developing. It is normal to have unevenness in the amount of growth between the left and right breasts. The amount of growth varies, but most people can expect to develop an "A" or "B" cup size.

Skin Changes

Your skin may become softer, drier, and pores may become smaller.

Emotional Fluctuations

Your overall emotional state may change. Transitioning can almost feel like a second puberty roller coaster of emotions. Talking with a counselor, therapist, and your doctor can help you explore new thoughts and feelings as you transition

Hot Flashes & Headaches

These side effects sometimes happen when starting on hormones, but often go away within a few weeks

Body Shape, Fat & Muscle Changes

You will notice changes to your body shape. Fat may distribute more around your face, hips, thighs, and buttocks. Your muscle mass and strength will decrease.

Changes to Sexual Function

Lowered ability to have and maintain an erection is usually seen within 1-3 months of beginning HT. You also may have lowered sexual desire. You will still have sexual sensation and the ability to orgasm, but may not ejaculate. Testicle size may decrease. Sperm production may decrease or stop.

Types of Feminizing Hormones

1

ESTROGENS

Decreases testosterone production by the testicles, decreases sperm production and erectile function, and increases breast tissue

- Estrogen comes in several forms: pills, injectables, and transdermal (patch).
 - Pills taken by mouth tend to be the least expensive form, but also have the most risk for dangerous side effects, like blood clots
 - Injectable estrogen can offer quicker effects for some people, but may also increase your risk for some side effects.
 - Transdermal estrogen patches are considered to be safest, but also tend to be the most expensive. They can also cause skin irritations on the area of your skin where you use them.
- Risks and side effects of estrogen include: high blood pressure, blood clots, liver problems, diabetes, headaches, changes in cholesterol, nausea and heart disease.

2

ANDROGEN BLOCKERS

Blocks the production and action of testosterone in the body, slows growth of hair on face and body, helps with growth of breast tissue, and can decrease erectile function and sperm production

- The most commonly prescribed androgen blocker is spironolactone. It is a pill that can be taken by mouth.
- Risks and side effects of androgen blockers include: Dizziness or light headedness, excessive urination (especially in the beginning of the treatment), can interact with some blood pressure medications, and can be damaging to the kidneys.

Questions or Concerns?

Call WE Health Clinic with any questions or concerns, our staff is happy to help!

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