

RISKS

Some of the medical risks of HRT that are considered minimal, if you're younger than 50, are blood clots, heart attacks, strokes, diabetes, migraines, autoimmune conditions either improving or worsening and hormonal triggered cancer risk. Nevertheless, the risks become higher if you have a coexisting health condition. Moreover, when taking estrogen, the risk of blood clots, strokes and heart attacks increases if you're a smoker. It is important to keep in mind that looking after your mental health plays a huge role in reducing these an aspect that is

verified by the improvement of their life quality after starting hormone therapy.

Non the less, mental health related risks that are associated with hormone replacement therapy, mood swings, worsening of anxiety, depression or other mental health conditions are possible due to the second puberty shifts.

If you wish to start hormone therapy, with any preexisting mental health condition it is best to undergo mental health therapy simultaneously to ensure you are looking after yourself as you start this journey.

CISGENDER BIAS IN THE MEDICAL / MENTAL HEALTH FIELD

Trans individuals perceive health care settings as a « gender policing structure » that is binary, heteronormative and cis-normative with limited to no recognition or understanding of non-binary identities. Whether unconscious or intentional, cisgender bias in health care systems affects the wellbeing of trans individuals causing the erasure of trans identities in terms of representation especially non-binary identities. The erasure of trans identities can be deeply felt by trans individuals leading to the loss of trust and discomfort of trans* individuals within the health care system causing feelings of insecurity, invisibility,

questioning areas of support and postponing needed medical care. Moreover, the medical system still has misconceptions of transness being the feeling to be born in the wrong body and seeking medical care to match the opposite sex's body composure which puts pressure on trans individuals to fully transition. Some of the structural cues signaling cisgender assumptions are: boys and girls washrooms, gendered toys, intake forms where gender is assumed, and in everyday interactions among health care providers due to lack of inclusive research. Improved care in health care settings should include awareness of providers on binary and non-binary trans individuals and health needs, and inclusion of pronouns, gender and sex options on intake forms.

SUBSTANCE USE EFFECT ON TRANSITION

Substance use, such as drugs, alcohol and smoking, affects trans bodies as it does with all bodies causing physical and mental health damage. Some of the forms of damage could include kidney damage, liver damage, heart problems, causing cancer, anxiety, depression, these are forms of damage that could possibly impact your gender affirming care results and/or your physical and mental health. Moreover, in terms of mental health, the damage could add up to the existing struggles that you might be subjected to.

RELATIONSHIP WITH DOCTORS AND GENDER AFFIRMING CARE BARRIERS

Transgender and non-conforming individuals face multiple barriers while accessing gender affirmation care. The barriers include financial limitations, lack of insurance, lack of service availability, worry and fear, medical issues, age and lack of information. In addition, other barriers you might face are the lack of awareness and education in medical and mental health settings leading to incidents of bias within the medical and mental health fields.

SELF-MEDICATION

It is important to know that taking higher doses of hormones does not speed up the treatment results and could endanger your health. Our bodies are different, therefore, each one of us will need a specific dosage in hormones to reach their goal in gender affirmation. Our bodies will react to hormone treatment at different paces and the hormones will affect us differently depending on our bodily composure, genetics and your age rather than on dosage, frequency and type of medication. It is important to have your own personal assessment regarding hormone treatment from a professional and not copy your friend's or a youtuber's treatment. After starting hormones' treatment, it is important to follow a routine preventive care. In the case of feminizing treatment, your routine should include breast cancer screening, prostate cancer screening and monitoring bone health. In the case of masculinizing treatment, your routine should include breast cancer screening, cervical cancer screening and monitoring bone health.

TGENDER & BEYOND

AN INFORMATIVE GUIDE ON EXISTING AS A TRANS PERSON

WHAT IS GENDER IDENTITY?

Gender is a social and legal status that is defined by a set of socially constructed expectations regarding your behaviour, characteristics and thoughts based on the sex you were assigned at birth and that vary from one culture to another. Due to previously constructed gender roles, it includes society's perception and interactions with an individual, defined by binary set gender roles. Gender Identity corresponds to your internal experience of who you are regardless of sex. It is a spectrum: There's the binary, encompassing the two identities man and woman and the non-binary encompassing all

genders that exist on the binary spectrum and beyond. Sex also exists across a spectrum of possibilities from male to intersex to female depending on physiological characteristics including genitalia, chromosome composition and hormonal makeups. Some bodies fit the binary sets of these characteristics while others form based on a combination of both sets of characteristics and are called « Intersex bodies ». Gender expression is the communication of your gender identity through clothes, accessories, hair and mannerisms. Throughout this pamphlet, we're going to be pointing out some information regarding the relationship between medical care and gender exploration and affirmation that might be beneficial to you.

MENTAL HEALTH AND GENDER AFFIRMING CARE

The gender affirming process through social, medical (surgery and/or hormones) and legal transition is associated with short term mental health improvement (improvement in psychological functioning, body satisfaction, decreased depression and suicidality) due to gender recognition and clinical staff support. Nevertheless, when in cisgender biased clinical settings, your mental health is at higher risk due to more frequent engagements in a cis-normative health care system. Moreover, due to stress from being minority that might cause a high risk of suicidality among trans individuals, it is important for you to seek mental health care early in gender affirming care and/or make sure you are connecting with peers that can support you in the process.



WHAT IS GENDER-AFFIRMING CARE?

Gender affirming care consists of a continuum of interventions such as social, psychological, behavioral, medical and/or legal that help align emotional, interpersonal and biological aspects of a person's life in order to affirm their gender. It is to be noted that gender affirmation care is very hard to find.

It is an individualized journey where approaches may differ from one person to another nevertheless, leading to the same goal that is gender affirmation and to a sex that is on the non-binary spectrum of sex. In the case of trans men and trans woman, your bodies may be binary in appearance, as desired. As previously mentioned, you will need your resources to guide the journey that is right for you. For some, gender affirmation could include surgical (top and/or bottom surgery) and/or hormonal intervention (hormone replacement or micro-dosing) while others could resort to other procedures for instance voice therapy.

ARE THE EFFECTS OF HORMONE REPLACEMENT THERAPY PERMANENT?



Many of the changes from HRT persist such as deeper voice, larger clitoris, scalp hair loss and increased body and facial hair for masculinizing treatment, while others require continuity in treatment, therefore are not permanent such as muscle mass, menstruation, body fat distribution in the case of masculinizing treatment. Moreover, many effects can be reversed depending on how long it has been since you started hormone replacement therapy. In the case of feminizing treatment, when stopping the medication, most effects will reverse themselves. Nevertheless, some breast growth, nipple development and reduced fertility or sterility will not.

HOW TO STAY INFORMED

First of All: Collect your Sources!

Whether it's a friend, an organization or google, always have multiple trusted sources / references that you know you can count on for information, support or leads to resources.

The goal is not treatment, rather it is creating a safe environment for exploration to improve life quality and lessen gender dysphoria.



MICRO-DOSING

You might not want the « full » masculinizing / feminizing effects of hormone replacement therapy. You should know that it is possible to control the extent of the effects by tailoring your hormone dose intake to help you achieve the gender presentation that represents you best, also known as micro-dosing mostly preferred by some non-binary individuals. It is important to keep in mind that the changes depend on dosage and on individual factors such as age, health and genetics.

CONCLUSION

In brief, it is important to know that you do not need fixing nor to fit in constructs that are set by others and to take care of yourself and of your mental health while listening to your body and taking care of it in terms of testing and aftercare. Moreover, do not take mental health lightly, it plays a dominant role in your wellbeing and health in general.

Dear Trans People

This booklet is not intended to replace any doctor or specialist. Its aim is to raise awareness and disseminate clear and comprehensive information so that the individual in our trans community can make sound decisions for their mental and physical health.

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