

## **Masculinizing Therapy**

Masculinizing therapy most typically includes treatment with testosterone by injection or transdermal gels/patches. Injection tends to be the most popular, though, because transdermal gels/patches are quite expensive and many insurance companies do not cover them.

It should be noted before reading about the changes that occur that everyone is different. Everyone will develop along a different timeline and with different results. Hormone dosages and route will vary between person to person because of age, metabolism, lifestyle habits, goals, etc. So don't think that just because someone is on a higher/different dose that they are getting a better transition than you are.

This will be a second puberty, and it will take time. So be patient. The average puberty takes anywhere from 2-5 years.

**Hair:** Body hair will thicken and darken and increase in amount to reflect a more male body hair pattern. A beard doesn't typically fill out for a year or so, and can take up to 5 years. This is partly due to genetics. You will also likely experience some receding of your hairline near the temples. And if baldness runs in your family, that could be in your future, too. Minoxidil (Rogaine) and other treatments can help mitigate this a bit.

**Breasts:** These will be there, unfortunately. Not much to be done besides bind or have surgery.

**Fat/Muscles:** Your fat will redistribute itself in a more male pattern, less on the hips, butt, and thighs and more to the shoulders, back, and abdomen. The fat around your face will shift and give you a rougher appearance. Your muscle mass will likely eventually increase by about 30%. Regular exercise can help maximize these results. If top surgery is in your future, good muscle development of the chest, back, and shoulders will gain better surgical outcomes. Bone structure does not really change much, that is a myth. There are subtle changes to cartilage, bone density, and whatnot, but you will not get taller.

**Skin:** The skin will get thicker and you will likely experience some degree of acne, so get a good facial cleansing routine going. You will also sweat more and smell differently.

**Emotions/Personality:** It is a myth that your personality changes. You will still be yourself. However, this is a second puberty, and mood changes can happen. Testosterone usually encourages aggression and increases sexual drive. Many patients have also told me that they no longer experience emotions the same. For example, the Hallmark movie that they used to cry during no longer affects them as much.

**Sex:** As in, intercourse and libido. Your clitoris will enlarge a great deal. Also, your sex drive will increase a lot. This is a time to explore what feels good to you. You may find new things that give you pleasure. Experiment!

**Genitals:** As mentioned above, the clitoris will enlarge a lot. You may also notice vaginal atrophy and decreased ability to naturally lubricate this area, which can cause infections and discomfort. Sometimes, topical estrogen applied to this area can help ease the discomfort. If you still desire penetrative sex, then get a good water-based lubricant to use during, and be generous with its application.

**Fertility:** Testosterone can harm a fetus, so you need to be extra careful about safe sex if you have sex with a person who has sperm. And if you become pregnant, stop taking testosterone immediately if you plan to carry the pregnancy to term.

In general, testosterone therapy will likely render you infertile after a couple months, but that does not mean you should rely on it as birth control. You can still take birth control pills even on testosterone therapy if you need to. Otherwise, use condoms or another form of protection. Some people have been able to regain fertility when they come off of testosterone therapy for several months, but there is a very real chance that you could be permanently infertile. This is a serious decision to make, and it is recommended that if you want to freeze some of your own eggs, that you do this prior to starting hormone therapy. The process of having an egg harvested and frozen is mild-moderately difficult and somewhat costly, anywhere from \$3000-\$5000 on average.

Your periods will slow and then likely stop altogether. There may sometimes be breakthrough spotting, though, especially during the first couple years of therapy. Always report spotting to your provider in case it needs to be followed up on because testosterone can aggravate uterine fibroids if you have them.

**Other potential side effects:**

Testosterone causes an increased blood count, meaning a thickening of the blood. You may notice that you no longer are as effected by the cold. Because of this thickening, periodic labs will check to make sure it doesn't get too thick, which would put you at risk for clots. If your blood count gets higher than is acceptable, the solution for this can be either decreasing the dose of testosterone or donating blood every 3-4 months.

There are conflicting studies that discuss an increased cardiovascular risk for events such as heart attacks and strokes. While the evidence is currently not too solid and more theoretical, it is still important to be aware of this potential risk. Periodic labs to assess cholesterol and risk for diabetes will be necessary.

\*If you have any other questions, please ask your provider during your appointment, or message them anytime\*