



Love Your Body! A Transwoman's Guide to Health and Wellness

Our transwomen's bodies come in all colors, shapes and sizes, and all of us need to take care of them. However, good health care can be hard to get, due to discrimination, lack of medical clinicians who understand our needs, and lack of health insurance coverage. To keep our bodies healthy and whole, we must become informed consumers, educating our health care providers and ourselves.

HORMONE THERAPY - Involves taking estrogen and sometimes an anti-androgen to promote breast development, soften skin, lighten body and facial hair, decrease fat in the belly and increase fat in the hips and thighs. It is not risk-free, and you should not take estrogen without medical supervision and regular blood tests. If you are taking estrogen or considering it, keep these points in mind:

- Every transwoman's body is different – there is no way to predict how your body will respond to estrogen. Taking more estrogen than prescribed by your clinician will not speed up the changes you desire, and will possibly make you ill.
- After breast growth occurs, you should learn how to do a monthly Breast Self-Examination (BSE). You also should get an annual breast exam and an annual mammogram.
- If you smoke, quit – because smoking increases the risk of blood clots while taking estrogen. Blood clots can stop the blood flow within your legs, lungs, brain (stroke) or heart (heart attack), all of which can cause permanent damage, including paralysis and even death.
- If you want to become a biological parent in the future, you should consider freezing your sperm prior to starting estrogen. Estrogen lowers your sperm count and will eventually cause infertility. However, you still could make someone pregnant, especially in your first year of hormonal use. If you have penetrative sex with someone who can get pregnant, you should use condoms or some other protective barrier.
- You still should get an annual prostate exam, even if you've had Sex Reassignment Surgery. Taking estrogen should reduce prostate problems, but there is a slight chance it may cause prostate enlargement.
- If you inject estrogen, never share your syringes with anyone. Discard used syringes immediately and safely. If you can't afford new syringes, contact your local needle exchange program.

Injecting silicone is dangerous to your health. The safest way to get your curves is still through medically supervised hormone therapy. Contact a local transgender support group for the most experienced doctors in your area, or inquire at a local gay and lesbian clinic.

SEX REASSIGNMENT SURGERY - If you want Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS), follow the Standards of Care of the Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association (HBIGDA). Although imperfect, these guidelines still offer the best protection for patients and surgeons. After SRS, see a gynecologist for a pelvic exam once a year.

SEXUAL HEALTH - Use condoms or a protective barrier with your sex partners. If you've engaged in unsafe sex, be sure to get tested for Sexually Transmitted Diseases.

MENTAL HEALTH - Living in an intolerant world can cause stress, anxiety and depression. A mental health therapist can really help you deal with things. Take care of your body and your mind.

HELPFUL WEBSITES : www.gender.org • www.drbecky.com/trans.html • www.tsroadmap.com • www.transhealth.org • www.lgbthealth.net



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