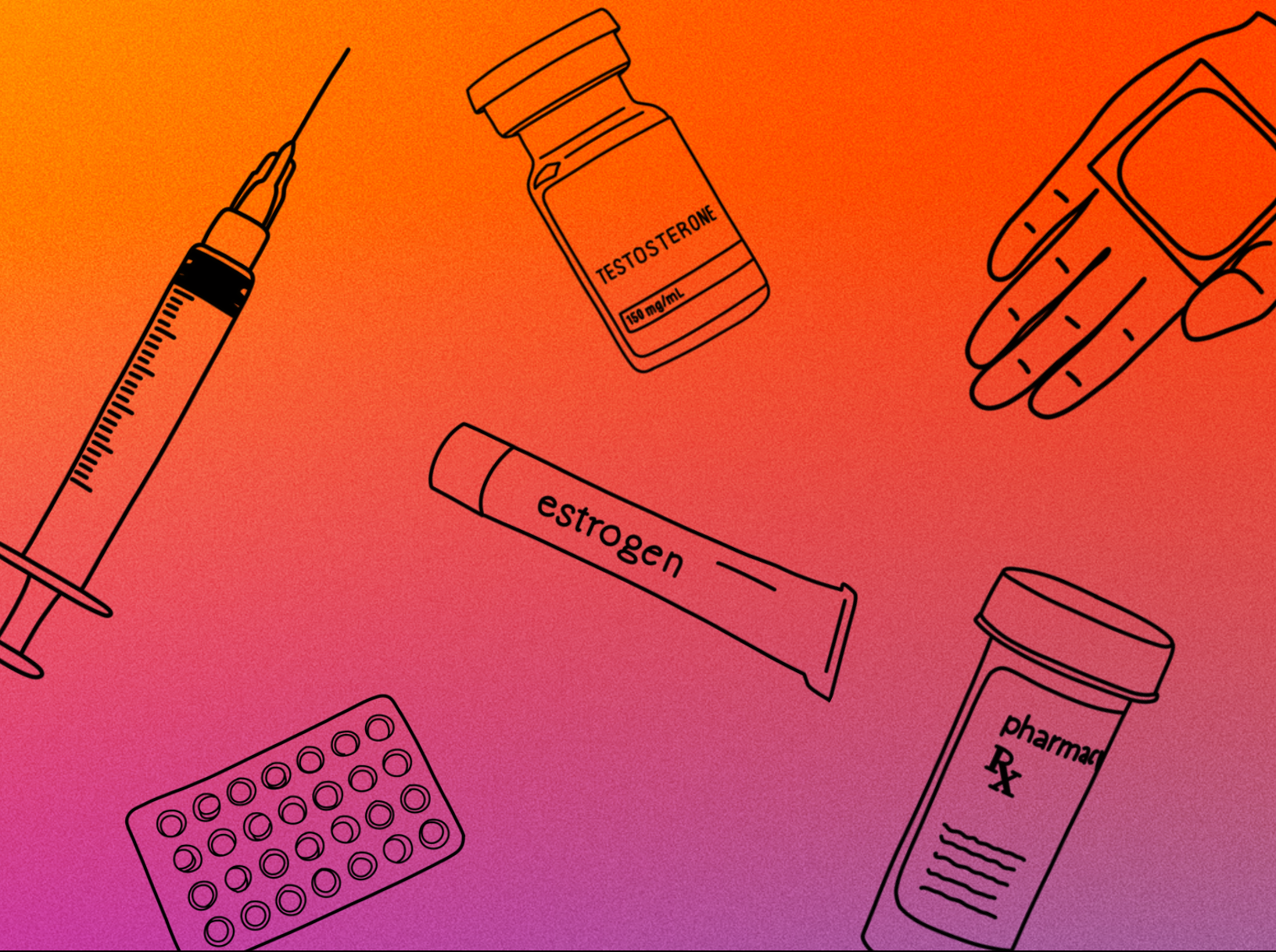


NAVIGATING ACCESS TO GENDER AFFIRMING HORMONE THERAPY

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APRIL 2024

**NATIONAL
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COALITION**

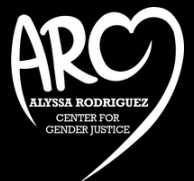


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I. INTRODUCTION

A. PURPOSE OF THE GUIDE

Given the hostile political and social environments faced by many Transgender, Gender Non-Conforming, Non-Binary, and Intersex Individuals (TGNCNBI), this document aims to provide guidance and support for those navigating the challenges associated with Gender Affirming Hormone Therapy (GAHT), also known as Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT).

Whether dealing with shortages, experiencing access issues due to supply constraints, forced detransition, or other barriers, this guide is tailored to empower individuals within the TGNCNBI community. The guide seeks to empower TGNCNBI folks to assert control over their health, enhance access to GAHT, and navigate their rights effectively. We hope it will help you make informed decisions about your healthcare and overall well-being.

Disclaimer: Please note that this guide is not a substitute for professional medical advice. Always consult a qualified healthcare provider before starting or changing any GAHT regimen. Additionally, this information is subject to change as these topics evolve over time.

Acknowledgments: We would like to thank the many collaborators who offered their time and expertise to Lighthouse Learning Collective for this guide. Miss Jai from Toadhenge Consulting, G Wallner with guidance from Sruti Mohan and Ray Stevens, Alyssa Rodriguez Center for Gender Justice, and National Harm Reduction Coalition. We'd like to thank Han Hamel of NH Harm Reduction Coalition for their graphic design assistance.

Dedication: In memory of our beloved TGNCNBI community members who have tragically lost their lives to systemic violence. May this guide stand as a tribute to their resilience and inspire a future where gender-affirming care is accessible and safe for all.

II. UNDERSTANDING GENDER AFFIRMING HORMONE THERAPY (GAHT)

A. WHAT IS GAHT?



GAHT is a way for many TGNCNBI people to affirm their gender through the use of hormones. Although many TGNCNBI people take hormones, it's important to remember that taking hormones is not required to identify as TGNCNBI. There is no correct or prescribed way to identify or express oneself.

People take hormones for many different reasons, and may also choose to only take them for a certain time or at a lower dose to get the effects they're looking for. In fact, only 31% of trans adults report having used hormones.¹ GAHT is only one part of someone's gender-affirming journey, as there are also medical, legal, and social transitions.

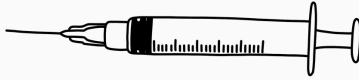
Not everyone has access to hormones. People without insurance will most likely turn to alternative ways to get GAHT. However, some people are considered 'underinsured,' which means that their insurance does not cover all or some of their care and may cause them to need to access hormones in other ways. About 10% of TGNCNBI Americans use nonprescription hormones, based on this study.² While some have success obtaining their hormones this way, there can be risks. Unregulated medications are not checked for quality, formulation, or dosing, and people may not have a way to monitor their levels.

¹ Kirzinger, A., Kearney, A., Montero, A., Sparks, G., Dawson, L., & Brodie, M. (2023, March 24). KFF/The Washington post trans survey. Retrieved from <https://www.kff.org/report-section/kff-the-washington-post-trans-survey-trans-in-america/>

² Stroumsa, D., Crissman, H.P., Dalton, V.K., Kolenic, G., & Richardson, C.R. (2020). Insurance coverage and use of hormones among Transgender respondents to a national survey. *Annals of Family Medicine*, 18(6), 528-534. <https://doi.org/10.1370/afm.2586>

1. WAYS TO TAKE GAHT

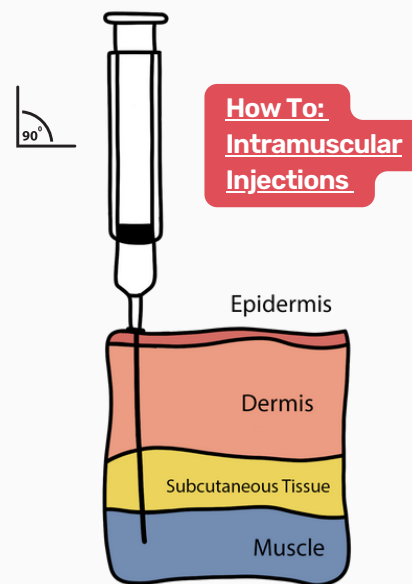
A. Injections



Depending on the hormone and the way you want it to be absorbed into your body, you can either inject intramuscularly (IM) or subcutaneously (SubQ). IM injections put the hormone directly into the muscle. SubQ injections put the hormone into the fatty tissue just below the surface of the skin. Some spots on the body are better for IM, and some are better for SubQ. To see where and how to inject, check out this guide created by [FOLX Health](#).

Intramuscular injections (IM) are when you inject your substance into muscle tissue (this requires a longer/thicker needle to reach the muscle) due to going deeper into the body). Folks typically inject into the outer thigh or upper/outer butt area (but this can be typically more inconvenient if you're self-injecting and can result in nerve damage³). When doing IM, you need a longer and thicker needle because you need to go through more of your body to deliver the medication. The thickness of the needle is measured and referred to as the 'gauge (g).' IM injections typically call for a 22g - 25g needle that is between 1-1.5 inches long. The higher the

needle gauge, the thinner the needle, which usually means the injection is less painful! It's also important to know that the needle should be injected at a 90-degree angle, which is different from subcutaneous injections.



Subcutaneous injections

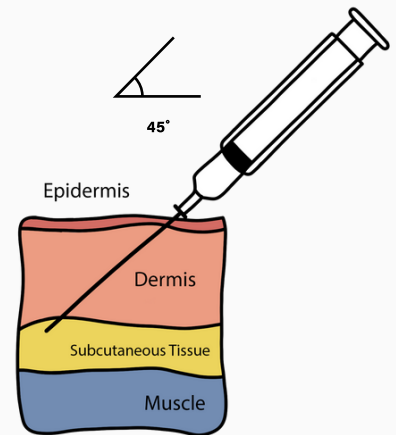
(SubQ) are when you inject your substance into the fatty tissue under the skin (so it doesn't go as deep as the muscle and is typically much less painful!). Folks typically inject around the belly (avoiding the belly button), fatty parts of their arm or the outer parts of their thighs. SubQ allows for a smaller needle, usually 5/8 or 1/2 in long, and 23-27g. The needle needs to be injected at a 45-degree angle. This method is typically less painful than IM because you are not injecting into the muscle.

³ Jung Kim H & Hyun Park S. (2014). Sciatic nerve injection injury. Journal of International Medical Research, 42(4),887-897. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0300060514531924>

1. WAYS TO TAKE GAHT

B. Injections

If you can't get your hands on needles or buy them at the pharmacy, you can buy them online or check with your local [syringe services program](#) (SSP) to see if they have what you need. Also, if you need a sharps container and can't get one online or at an SSP, just use any container with a lid and with a thick wall (think laundry detergent, cat litter container, or a coffee can) to put them in. Screw the lid on the container and seal it with duct tape when it is about $\frac{3}{4}$ full, and label it 'sharps.' You can [check here](#) for more information on properly disposing of needles and syringes in your state.



Are you feeling nervous about injecting? While some people may have little issue initially, they may struggle over time. Check out some tips on [overcoming fear of self-injection](#).

Pills

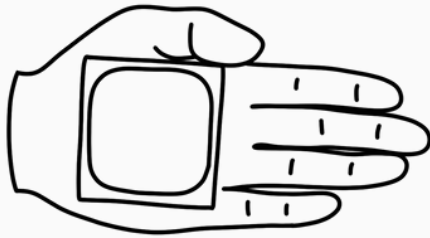
Pills provide a steady dose of hormones vs. more of an up-and-down dose that folks tend to get when they inject their hormones. It is much more common for people taking estrogen to take pills than people taking testosterone. Estradiol is the most common and affordable form of estrogen usually prescribed. For testosterone, there have been a few oral medications approved for use, but they are costly and may cause high blood pressure.⁴ Pills do not need to be taken with food, but you're welcome to do so if that makes it easier for you!



⁴ White WB, Dobs A, Carson C, DelConte A, Khera M, Miner M, Shahid M, Kim K, & Chidambaram N.(2021). Effects of a novel oral testosterone undecanoate on ambulatory blood pressure in hypogonadal men. Journal of Cardiovascular Pharmacology & Therapeutics, 26(6), 630-637. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/10742484211027394>

1. WAYS TO TAKE GAHT

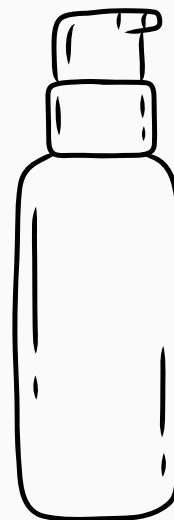
Patches



Transdermal patches are a great option for folks who don't like injecting or taking pills. There is also less fluctuation in hormone levels than with injecting. Transdermal patches may be a good option for those taking estrogen and have an increased risk of blood clots.⁵ Some experience skin irritation due to the adhesive, and it's important to know that you can't get the patch wet—so if you're sweating a lot, going for a swim, or taking a shower, make sure to cover it with a transparent film dressing like Tegaderm. It's recommended to replace the patch every 3–4 days, or according to what your dose should be. It's also important to know that patches only go up to a certain dose, so that could mean wearing more than one patch at a time. Patches are typically worn on the back, stomach, thighs or upper arm.

Gel

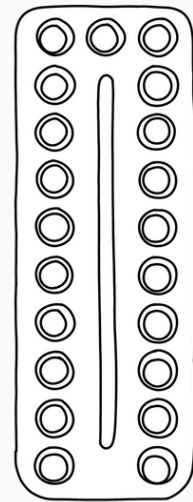
Much like with patches, gel provides a steady dose of the hormone into your system. Gels are typically applied to the skin each day and require waiting until it's dry to get dressed, and waiting at least a couple of hours before showering or swimming. Most apply the gel to their upper arms and shoulders or the front and back of their thighs, or their abdomen. It's recommended to wash the area where you applied the gel if you expect to have skin to skin contact, because the medicine can be transferred to another person if they touch that area. Even if the area is dry, the gel continues to be absorbed through the skin for 5–6 hours.⁶



⁵ Speroff, L. (2010). Transdermal hormone therapy and the risk of stroke and venous thrombosis. *Climacteric*, 13(5), 429–32. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3109/13697137.2010.507111>

⁶ FOLX Health. (2022, January 12). Testosterone gel for gender-affirming hormone therapy. Retrieved from <https://www.folxhealth.com/library/testosterone-gel-hrt-what-where-how>

B. TYPES OF GAHT MEDICATIONS FOR TGNCNBI PEOPLE



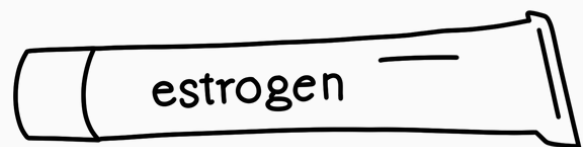
1. Estrogen (E)

Effects

Estrogen is a hormone prescribed to people who want to lower their testosterone levels and raise their estradiol levels. Taking estrogen results in breast development, softer skin texture, decreased muscle mass, and a redistribution of fat (mostly to the thighs and butt).

Estradiol valerate is the most common injectable estrogen available in the US. Estradiol cypionate is another form. Folks get the same effects, but evidence shows that estradiol cypionate moves through the body in a less predictable way than valerate, meaning that it may be better suited for people who inject less frequently (biweekly vs weekly). However, it's crucial to emphasize that both medications will lead to comparable levels in the blood and produce similar effects.⁸ Although it may make some changes appear faster, it doesn't keep your dose as steady as with pills. Sometimes, people take anti-androgens like spironolactone to help keep their levels stable, but this isn't always necessary.

Note that estrogen will not affect your voice or make all of your body hair disappear, although it can decrease the thickness and will grow slower. You may find that your emotional state changes a bit, especially as you interact with family, friends, coworkers, and in other aspects of your life. It may be a good idea to talk to a therapist or get some peer support to help you navigate these changes (See Section B. Community Resources and Support Groups). Estrogen minimally increases risk of blood clots, heart attacks, strokes, diabetes, and cancer. Risk increases for folks with pre-existing health conditions or if folks start GAHT after the age of 50.⁹

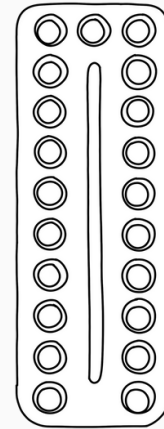


⁷ FOLX Health. (2022, January 26). Estrogen gender-affirming hormone replacement therapy (HRT) methods and dosage offered by FOLX. Retrieved from <https://www.folxhealth.com/library/estrogen-hrt-routes>

⁸ Fenway Health. (n.d.). Hormone Options: Estrogen Therapy. Retrieved from <https://fenwayhealth.org/wp-content/uploads/Estrogen-Options-English.pdf>

⁹ Deutsch, M. (2020, July). Information on estrogen hormone therapy. UCSF Transgender Care. Retrieved from <https://transcare.ucsf.edu/article/information-estrogen-hormone-therapy>

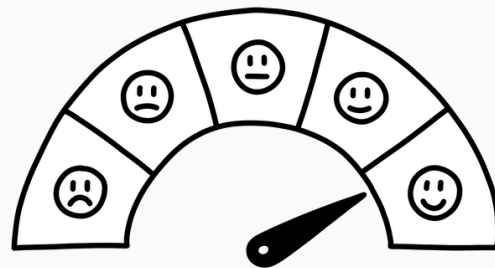
B. TYPES OF GAHT MEDICATIONS FOR TGNCNBI PEOPLE



Effects

You may or may not experience the following:

- Development of breast buds beneath the nipples and breast tissue growth
- Skin change
- Your skin will likely produce less oil. You may experience softening of skin, bruising more easily, and changes in skin pigmentation.
- Fat redistribution to hips and thighs and belly
- You might notice your face shape shifts as well.
- Difficulty building muscle
- Changes in sexuality
- It's possible your desire for sex may increase or decrease. You may notice your attraction shifting as well. You may discover or redefine your sexuality. Softening of external genitals and decrease in erections is common. ([see Section B.3 for more info on sexual health](#)).



- Changes in emotions
- People on E commonly describe "intensifying" emotions.
- A hormonal/emotional cycle that follows a monthly pattern rather than the daily hormonal cycle that cis men experience. Tracking your cycle for emotional shifts and regularity in a calendar or diary can help you understand a new emotional landscape.
- PMS symptoms
- Inability to make sperm

B. TYPES OF GAHT MEDICATIONS FOR TGNCNBI PEOPLE



2. Anti-Androgens - Spironolactone

Spironolactone, or spiro for short, is a super common anti-androgen that's often used to supplement estrogen. It comes in pill form and can be used once or twice daily. Taking it earlier in the day is encouraged since it can cause you to pee more. Since it's a diuretic, it can also lower your blood pressure. With that said, it's a good idea to increase your water intake to stay hydrated. Considering spironolactone's impact on potassium levels, it's advisable to undergo blood tests and cut down on foods high in potassium.¹⁰ Get your glomerular filtration rate (eGFR) and urine albumin-creatinine ratio (uACR) checked to assess kidney health, and assess serum potassium for heart health.

Finasteride

Finasteride (DHT, or dihydrotestosterone) is a DHT blocker that specifically works on hair follicles and prevents hair loss. It comes in a pill form, although some companies sell it as a liquid or a foam, and may be a better option for trans folks taking testosterone as some experience 'spotting' or a return of menstruation after taking it orally. Although finasteride is more common with trans masculine folks to prevent hair loss, it can be used to supplement spironolactone use if you're already taking a high dose of it.



¹⁰ National Health Service. (2022, July 6). About spironolactone. Retrieved from <https://www.nhs.uk/medicines/spironolactone/about-spironolactone/>

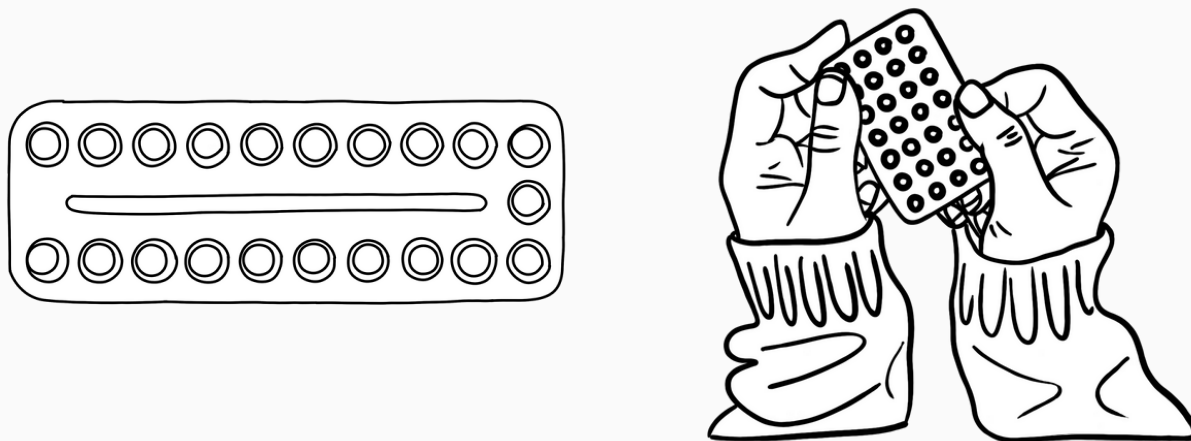
B. TYPES OF GAHT MEDICATIONS FOR TGNCNBI PEOPLE

Dutasteride

Much like finasteride, dutasteride is also a DHT blocker that usually comes in pill form. Studies have shown that dutasteride is stronger and more effective than finasteride, but ultimately, it's up to you, your body, and your desired effects.¹¹

Progesterone

Progesterone is less common but is also taken in pill form. People sometimes take it to help stabilize their mood or because they want some help getting curves or increasing their breast size. However, there is a lot of debate and a lack of science surrounding how well this medication works for folks and can have a negative impact on mood and cholesterol levels.



¹¹ Zhou Z, Song S, Gao Z, Wu J, Ma J, Cui Y. (2019). The efficacy and safety of dutasteride compared with finasteride in treating men with androgenetic alopecia: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Clinical Interventions in Aging*, 20(14), 399-406. <https://doi.org/10.2147/cia.s192435>

B. TYPES OF GAHT MEDICATIONS FOR TGNCNBI PEOPLE



3. Testosterone (T)

Effects

Testosterone is a hormone typically associated with facial and body hair growth and a deeper voice. Testosterone helps regulate bone density, fat distribution, and red blood cell production. It most often comes as an injectable liquid or gel. Another less common option is with **pellets under the skin** that slowly release testosterone.

Testosterone cypionate (TC) has long been the standard. Testosterone enanthate (TE) is an alternative that can be prescribed if people have an allergy to the oil TC is suspended in. TC tends to stay in your body longer than TE, meaning you have to inject less often.

Note: Testosterone is classified as a schedule III controlled substance which can limit the access people have to it and also subjects people taking testosterone to surveillance through Prescription Drug Monitoring Programs (PDMPs).¹²

Testosterone affects everybody differently. The length of time you take testosterone, changing your dose, and stopping testosterone all affect the changes you will experience. Listed below are the changes you could experience on T.

- More oily skin/acne (acne is often most common in the early days of taking testosterone)
- Deeper voice
- Your voice might crack as it's changing, and your vocal cords might feel a little scratchy or sore as your voice drops. If you stop taking testosterone, your voice will not return to a higher register.
- Menstruation/bleeding stops
- You may stop bleeding very soon after your start T, or you may bleed for a long time while on T. It's possible you might start to bleed randomly even after months or years without a period. If you go off of testosterone or significantly lower your dose, menstruation will, more likely than not, return.

¹² Markey, E. J. (2022, September 16). Senator Markey calls on Biden admin. to lift barriers to testosterone, expand access to gender-affirming hormone therapy. Retrieved from <https://www.markey.senate.gov/news/press-releases/senator-markey-calls-on-biden-admin-to-lift-barriers-to-testosterone-expand-access-to-gender-affirming-hormone-therapy>

B. TYPES OF GAHT MEDICATIONS FOR TGNCNBI PEOPLE

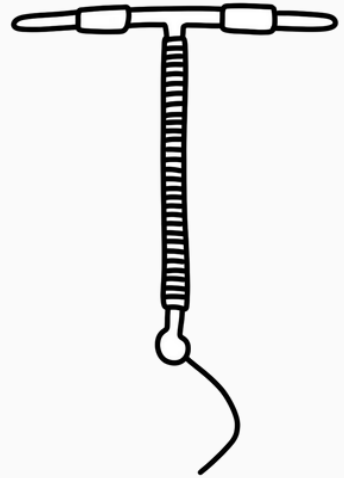


3. Testosterone (T) Effects Continued

- Some report experiencing 'phantom cramps' which feel similar to menstrual cramps but happen without any spotting or bleeding.
- External Genital Growth "Bottom Growth"
- Your clit, cock, t-dick, (so many words to choose from!) will enlarge, become more sensitive, and get hard during arousal ([see Section B.3 for more info on sexual health](#)).
- Body fat redistribution
- Some people notice less fat around the hips, belly, chest, and entire body, or the shifting of where body fat is concentrated. You might notice your face shape shifts and you might have more noticeable veins as well.
- Increased muscle mass and strength
- It's likely you will find it easier to build muscle when working out.
- Facial hair growth, body hair growth, hair becoming coarser
- Head hair loss
- Changes in sexual desire or sexual preference
- Often people on T report an increased sex drive, but it's also possible your desire for sex will decrease or just simply shift. You may notice your attraction shifting as well. You may discover or redefine your sexuality.
- Changes in emotions
- Some might feel improvements in mental wellbeing and an overall reduction in gender dysphoria, while others may face challenges as they navigate emotional changes.



B. TYPES OF GAHT MEDICATIONS FOR TGNCNBI PEOPLE



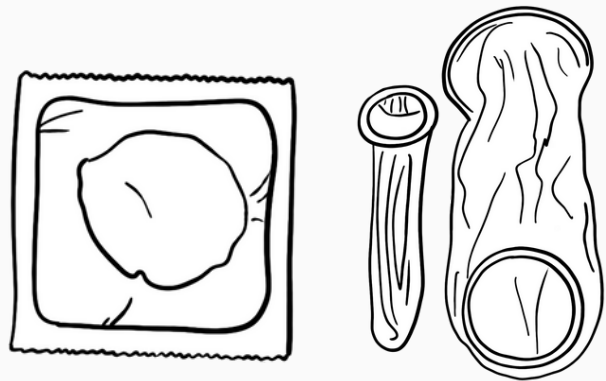
3. Testosterone (T) - Fertility

Historically, when starting testosterone, people have been required to sign a form that says they understand they will become infertile, or that their fertility will decrease. However, more recent studies on the effects of testosterone show that this practice was due to lack of research, not actual evidence that testosterone always, or even commonly, causes infertility. Rather, some studies suggest that going on T causes the ovaries to do something more similar to “hibernation.”¹³ This is why if someone is on T, and wants to get pregnant, they’ll have to go off of it during pregnancy. However, there is still a lack of research in this area, so if you’re going on T and want to have kids, you can look into options like freezing your eggs.

Note: Taking testosterone does NOT mean someone can’t get pregnant! It’s recommended to use condoms, and birth control if you have sex with someone with a penis.

Some may think taking a higher dose of testosterone is the way to go to achieve the look and feel they want. This is not the case because excess testosterone can convert into estrogen and cause one’s period to return.

Trans folks taking testosterone are able to take any form of birth control—hormonal or not. However, people taking puberty blockers are encouraged to use non-hormonal birth control like a copper IUD or hormone-free front hole gel like Phexxi.



¹³ Compton, J. (2020, April 14). Transgender fertility study sheds light on testosterone's impact. NBC News. Retrieved from <https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/transgender-fertility-study-sheds-light-testosterone-s-impact-n1182636>

III. ENSURING SAFETY AND LEGITIMACY OF GAHT MEDICATIONS

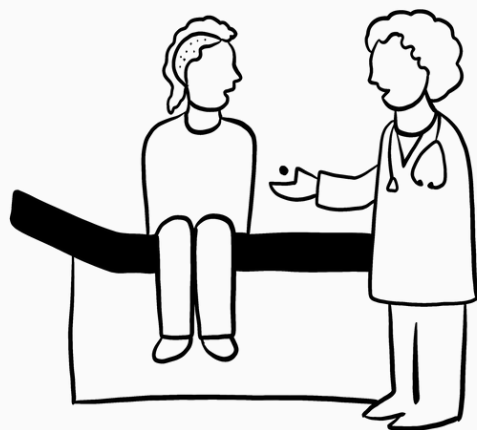
A. Consultation with Qualified Healthcare Providers

1. Importance of Medical Supervision

It's super important to talk to a qualified medical provider before starting GAHT because hormones are powerful and can cause significant changes in the body. As mentioned in the last section, GAHT can increase the risk of blood clots and high cholesterol, so it's crucial to have a medical professional monitor the effects and make sure you're staying safe. Everyone's body is different, so the dosage and type of hormone you need may vary depending on your age, health, and other factors.¹⁴

Another important consideration is that some trans women or trans feminine people take birth control as their primary means of hormone therapy and may seek these medications in place of other forms of GAHT. This is worth mentioning because the hormones in birth control are in a different form and

at different levels than those used in GAHT.¹⁵ Although they may give some of the desired effects, they don't contain the anti-androgens which are used to block the effects of testosterone (see section II, part B), so changes may be slow or negligible.



¹⁴ Hedian, H. F., Norwood, A., Siegel, J., & Loeb, D. (2023). Quick guide to gender affirming hormone therapy. Retrieved from <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/-/media/center-for-transgender-health/documents/tgd-gaht-quick-guide.pdf>

¹⁵ SH:24. (2024, February 2). Can trans feminine people use the contraceptive pill in place of hormone therapy? Retrieved from <https://sh24.org.uk/help-centre/can-trans-feminine-people-use-the-contraceptive-pill-in-place-of-hormone>

III. ENSURING SAFETY AND LEGITIMACY OF GAHT MEDICATIONS

A. Consultation with Qualified Healthcare Providers

2. Finding Affirming Healthcare Providers

Finding an affirming healthcare provider can be challenging, but there are several ways to do so. Here are some tips:

1. To find LGBTQ+ healthcare providers, consider consulting online directories such as the Gay and Lesbian Medical Association's Provider Directory or the Transgender Legal Defense and Education Fund's [Health Care Provider Directory](#), in addition to reaching out to local LGBTQ+ organizations for suggestions.

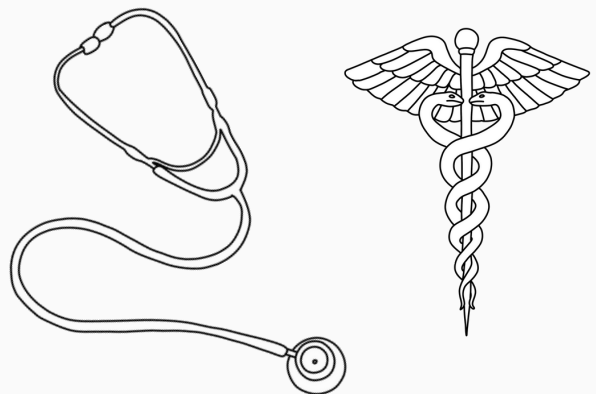
2. Ask for referrals from friends or family who have experience with affirming healthcare providers.

3. Check with your insurance provider to find out which providers are in-network and accepting new patients.

If you don't have insurance, you may be able to get care from a local community health center for little to no cost!

4. Make sure to ask potential providers about their experience working with LGBTQ+ patients, their services, and their approach to care.

Remember that finding an affirming healthcare provider can take time and may seem overwhelming, but it's worth the effort to find a provider who will provide the care and support you need.



III. ENSURING SAFETY AND LEGITIMACY OF GAHT MEDICATIONS

B. Evaluating Medications and Manufacturers

Tips to Get Legit GAHT

When navigating GAHT with limited or restricted access, it's vital to prioritize safety and authenticity in obtaining medications as much as possible. This section provides guidance on evaluating medications and manufacturers. Many TGNCNBI folks share or get hormones from their peers. If this is the case, it's a good idea to ask if they get a prescription or bought them online or from the street. The following tips will help you determine the quality and legitimacy of what you're getting.

Research Medications: Familiarize yourself with the medications mentioned in section 2 (types of GAHT medications for TGNCNBI people). We are careful not to say 'FDA approved' here because many of the hormones used for GAHT are used 'off-label,' meaning that the FDA has not yet approved them for this use (which is common).¹⁶

Check Medication Packaging: Most medications have specific packaging and labeling. Verify the packaging details, including holograms or unique identifiers that indicate the **product's authenticity**. Is the product name, manufacturer, or main ingredients misspelled? **That's a big red flag!**



Check Accreditation: Look for online pharmacies accredited by recognized pharmacy organizations. Legitimate online pharmacies often display seals of approval from organizations such as the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy (NABP). However, less than 5% of online pharmacies are legit.¹⁷

¹⁶ Goldman, M. (2023, December 15). How FDA could boost gender-affirming care for trans patients despite state restrictions. Axios. Retrieved from <https://www.axios.com/2023/12/15/fda-transgender-hormone-therapy-gender-affirming-care>

¹⁷ Hertig JB, James SM, Hummel CJ, & Rubin MJ. (2021). Evaluation of pharmacists' awareness of illegal online pharmacies and perceived impact on safe access to medicines. *Medicine Access at Point of Care*, 18(5), 23992026211005642. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23992026211005642>

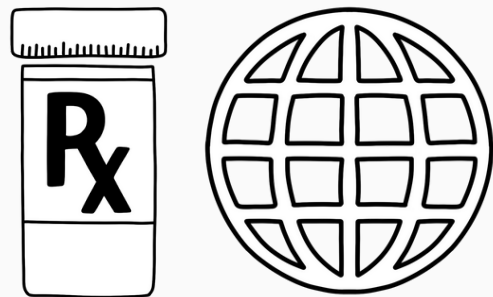
III. ENSURING SAFETY AND LEGITIMACY OF GAHT MEDICATIONS

B. Evaluating Medications and Manufacturers

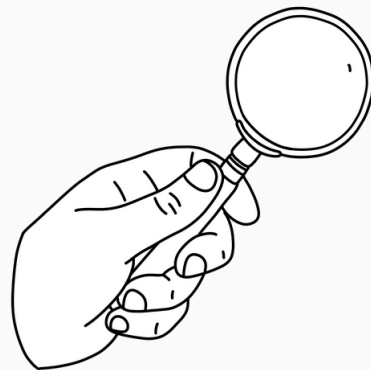
Tips to Get Legit GAHT

Verify Contact Information:

Legitimate online pharmacies provide clear contact information, including a physical address and phone number. Avoid websites with ambiguous contact details.



Read Reviews: Seek out reviews and testimonials from other TGNCNBI individuals who have used the online pharmacy. Genuine experiences shared by the community can offer valuable insights into the source's reliability. Visit message boards like Reddit to see what people have to say about certain medications!



Be Wary of Low Prices: Counterfeit medications are often associated with unusually low prices. If a deal seems too good to be true, it probably is. Prioritize your health over cost considerations.



IV. ACCESSING HORMONES WHEN UNABLE TO OBTAIN THEM TRADITIONALLY

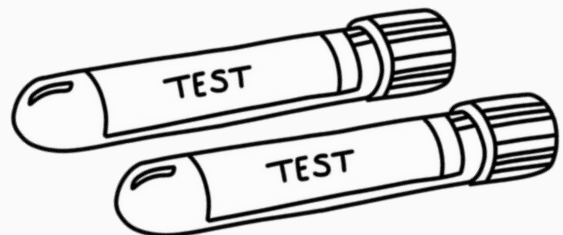
A. Support from Healthcare Providers

Are you already seeing a doctor?

If you are already seeing a doctor, there are several ways that your doctor can support you even if they cannot prescribe GAHT.

1. Your doctor can be an accomplice in your overall health and well-being. Though GAHT care is incredibly important for you, there may be other health needs your physician can continue to address and support you with. New restrictions that are affecting your physician's ability to care for you are not only frustrating for you, but also for your physician. Be honest about your frustrations and maintain lines of communication so that other health needs do not get lost in these changes.
2. Your doctor can likely continue monitoring your levels while you get GAHT from other sources.

3. Your doctor may be unable or willing to prescribe GAHT, but they may still be able to help with ordering lab work and talking with you about potential dose adjustments. Go to Section V on monitoring if you need to advocate for lab work and screening. Ongoing screening can help detect if the GAHT is causing any adverse effects to the body, such as erythrocytosis for those on testosterone (too many red blood cells),¹⁸ or high potassium levels for those on testosterone blockers.¹⁹



¹⁸ Madsen, M. C., van Dijk, D., Wiepjes, C. M., Conemans, E. B., Thijs, A., & den Heijer, M. (2021). Erythrocytosis in a large cohort of trans men using testosterone: A long-term follow-up study on prevalence, determinants, and exposure years. *The Journal of Clinical Endocrinology and Metabolism*, 106(6), 1710–1717. <https://doi.org/10.1210/clinem/dgab089>

¹⁹ National Health Service. (2022, July 6). About spironolactone. Retrieved from <https://www.nhs.uk/medicines/spironolactone/about-spironolactone/>

IV. ACCESSING HORMONES WHEN UNABLE TO OBTAIN THEM TRADITIONALLY

A. Support from Healthcare Providers

Do not have a doctor?

1. Get connected to a doctor to help monitor your health

- If you are ordering your medication online, check with the company to find out if they offer doctor's appointments. Sometimes the same company may have doctor's appointments available.
- Connect with an online service that provides both doctor's appointments and prescribes GAHT. Some examples include FOLX Health, Plume Health, Gender GP, and Circle Medical. You may need to reach out to multiple services to find one that works for you, or you may be waitlisted, so try and reach out early to get an appointment.

- Even if the doctor is not able to prescribe GAHT, connecting to a doctor can help with monitoring your levels, checking for other health concerns, and can help connect you to other health services (such as mental health, specialty care, etc.).

2. If you aren't able to establish care

- If you don't have health insurance, depending on where you live and your income, you may qualify for Medicaid insurance. If you are living with a chronic illness or disability, or are over 65, you may qualify for Medicare or financial assistance. If you are under 25 you may be able to get on a parent's insurance plan. If none of those work, you may qualify for sliding-scale medical care based on your income and being uninsured.

IV. ACCESSING HORMONES WHEN UNABLE TO OBTAIN THEM TRADITIONALLY

A. Support from Healthcare Providers

Do not have a doctor? CONTINUED

- Some states will also allow something called “Direct Access Testing,” where you can order a test from a lab directly, rather than needing a doctor to order. If you live in a state where this is possible, you would need to search for a lab that provides the type of testing you are looking for, pay for the lab fees upfront, and receive the results directly from the lab. **Here is a guide** on Direct Access Testing.
- If you can’t afford doctor’s appointments or medication, there are financial assistance options. **Genderbands** and **Point of Pride** both offer financial assistance grants for trans care.
- If waitlists are long or providers are unavailable, avoid changing your dosage/medication while trying to get in to see a provider. Check with other gender-expansive people about where they are receiving their GAHT. If you are wondering how to connect with others, check out some of the suggested resources in the next section.
- **Your health and well-being are important. You deserve to take steps to invest in yourself and take care of your body.**
- Learn more about self-care techniques in section 5.

IV. ACCESSING HORMONES WHEN UNABLE TO OBTAIN THEM TRADITIONALLY

B. Community Resources and Support Groups

Accessing healthcare as trans and gender non-conforming people can be difficult. Providers may be hostile, uneducated, or just unsure about how to serve and interact with trans patients, and medical systems are not set up to serve our community. There are community resources you can turn to in case you don't feel supported by your primary care provider or if you do not have a healthcare provider.

1. Accessing GAHT Services

- Find your nearest Local LGBTQ+ Community Center. Sometimes going in person and talking with other trans people can be a great jumping off point for accessing GAHT. Some LGBTQ+ centers have someone who works specifically with the trans community. There may be an advocate there who can help get

you in touch with local providers who prescribe GAHT, trans affirming therapists, etc. You can find [a map of LGBTQ+ Community Centers here.](#)

- Find local [trans-led organizations.](#) Other trans people will often have the latest on how to find care, and many of these organizations also offer other resources as well as ways to get involved to make change.
- If you're injecting GAHT, you'll need sterile syringes and supplies, which are sometimes difficult to access. Some Syringe Service Programs may have syringes & supplies specifically for GAHT, available for free. If you need help finding a SSP, check out this [SSP Finder.](#)

IV. ACCESSING HORMONES WHEN UNABLE TO OBTAIN THEM TRADITIONALLY

B. Community Resources and Support Groups

- You can call and ask if they have your syringe size. Just tell them the gauge (diameter of the hole) and length of your syringes (which can be found in your prescription). If you don't have a prescription, you can look at this [safer injecting resource](#), which describes the most common sizes for injecting GAHT [intramuscularly or subcutaneously](#).
- [Planned Parenthood](#) is one option outside of primary care where you can access GAHT. They can also take labs to monitor your levels. If you are a young person, Planned Parenthood is well versed in keeping your information confidential and not sharing with parents if they are unsupportive. You can go in person, or via Telehealth.
- [FOLX Health](#) and [Plume Health](#) are other places to access GAHT online.
- Fenway Institute has educational material on GAHT, including this in depth [injection guide](#).
- [For the Gworlds](#) has a Medical Assistance Fund specifically for Black trans people. It can help cover small co-pays and transportation to medical visits.
- This [article from Plume Health](#) discusses the intricacies of GAHT for non-binary people.

Note: When you discuss starting GAHT with a provider, you may be asked to give “proof”²⁰ that you have experienced dysphoria in the past 6 months. Although this is currently a requirement in medical systems, it is completely legitimate to wish to go on hormones because you feel it would increase your quality of life and improve your health, even if you aren't sure you've experienced gender dysphoria.

²⁰ American Psychiatric Association. (2022, August). What is gender dysphoria. Retrieved from <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/gender-dysphoria/what-is-gender-dysphoria>

IV. ACCESSING HORMONES WHEN UNABLE TO OBTAIN THEM TRADITIONALLY

B. Community Resources and Support Groups

2. Mental Health Resources

Going on hormones can be an exciting, turbulent, even scary step in transition. Having someone to talk with, especially a mental health provider, can be important. You may also need mental health support if you decide to change your dose or go off hormones, or if you are forced to go off due to unstable GAHT supply. Or you might want help working through emotional, interpersonal, and cultural shifts you may experience as you transition.

Sometimes it's hard to find someone to talk to who understands the experience of being trans or gender non-conforming or non-binary. Sometimes it's even hard to simply find a safe place to express the range of emotions that can come along with transition. You deserve care that invites your complex emotions and affirms that everyone's experience with GAHT is different.

Here are some affirming mental health resources:

- **National Queer and Trans Therapists of Color Network** – A resource to find a therapist who understands being queer, trans, and a person of color.
- **The Trans Lifeline** – A trans led crisis and peer-support hotline and online mental health resource database.
- **LGBT National Youth Talkline** – A phone hotline for youth.
- You can look on the **Psychology Today Therapist Finder** and add the “Non-Binary” filter, and it will show you Non-Binary therapists in your area. *Since providers can select without showing proof of experience, exercise caution.*
- This **article from FOLX Health** has more ideas for finding a trans competent therapist.
- The **Native Youth Sexual Health Network** has this **Mental Health Peer Support Manual, You Are Made of Medicine** for Indigiqueer, Two-Spirit, LGBTQ+, and Gender Non-conforming Indigenous Youth.

IV. ACCESSING HORMONES WHEN UNABLE TO OBTAIN THEM TRADITIONALLY

B. Community Resources and Support Groups

3. GAHT and Sexual Health Resources

Some people on GAHT experience shifts in their sexual orientation or their relationship to sex and desire while on GAHT.

GAHT may allow you to finally access sexual pleasure or be in touch with your body in ways that were previously unreachable. For this reason, trans people have created some wonderful resources on how to learn about your sexual pleasure. A shift in sexuality can mean needing to learn new sexual health practices as well.



a. These guides go in depth on safer sex practices and pleasure practices for trans people:

***Safer Sex for Trans Bodies**

***PUMP: Sexual Pleasure & Health Resource Guide for Transmen who Have Sex with Men**

***Fucking Trans Women Zine**

***Primed, A Sex Guide for Trans Men into Men**

***Brazen, Trans Women's Safer Sex Guide (an older guide, from 2013, which still has good information)**

b. GAHT can also change the way the body physically responds during sex. For people on testosterone, this could mean changes in the way the body produces its own lubrication, thinning of genital tissues (which could cause irritation), increased sensitivity, growth, and hardness in external genitals.²¹ For people on estrogen, this could look like changes in the way external genitals get hard when the body is aroused, increased nipple and breast sensation, and there are some accounts that point to estrogen increasing lubrication in the anus.²²

²¹ Deutsch, M.B. (2016, June 17). Overview of masculinizing hormone therapy. Retrieved from <https://transcare.ucsf.edu/guidelines/masculinizing-therapy>.

²² Deutsch, M.B. (2020, July). Information on estrogen hormone therapy. Retrieve from <https://transcare.ucsf.edu/article/information-estrogen-hormone-therapy>.

IV. ACCESSING HORMONES WHEN UNABLE TO OBTAIN THEM TRADITIONALLY

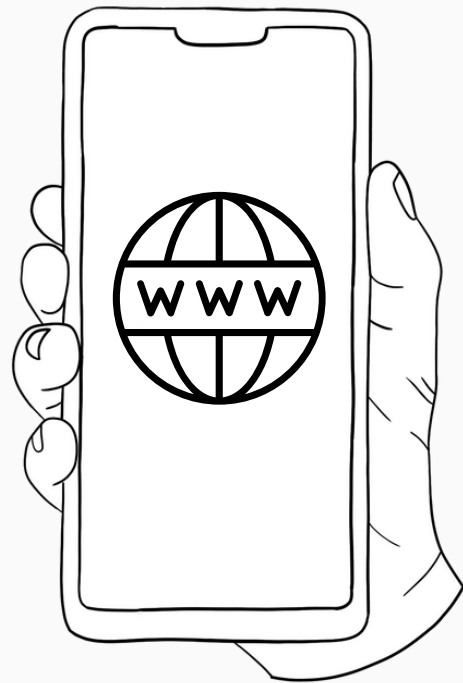
B. Community Resources and Support Groups

GAHT also can lead to an increase or decrease in desire for sex. Every body is different and change is normal! You can always talk to a doctor if you are experiencing a change that is causing discomfort during sex. There are many treatment options that will not impact your ability to continue taking hormones.

c. Finally, look to see if your city has a trans-affirming sex shop. They may have toys, apparel, and resources specifically made for bodies on GAHT.

C. Online Support Networks

Whether you are interested in starting hormones, have been on them for a while, or need to lower your dose/go off hormones, talking to other trans people on GAHT is the best way to find what you're looking for. Finding trans community in person is wonderful, but you might also find incredible support in online support networks like pages, forums, group chats, etc.



You may hear about a way to get more affordable hormones or supplies. You may see someone else speaking on an experience they had while on GAHT that you were worried was only happening to you.

Even if your immediate community isn't supportive, or you just don't yet feel ready to talk with them about GAHT, you'll find a whole online community of fellow trans people who have your back.

IV. ACCESSING HORMONES WHEN UNABLE TO OBTAIN THEM TRADITIONALLY

C. Online Support Networks

1. Plume Health offers a six week virtual support group as part of their membership.

2. Type “trans” into the search bar on Meetup and find online and in person support groups.

3. Facebook Groups

- Search for your local “queer exchange page” or “queer event page.” Depending on where you live there might even be a specifically trans exchange/event page.
- There are many support groups on Facebook pertaining to GAHT and gender-affirming surgery; it’s best to check out the private pages, read the guidelines, and make sure you feel safe before posting any pictures or medical information.
- “Trans People and the Allies Who Support Them” is an all ages group for trans people and allies.

4. On Reddit there are several threads for Trans people and GAHT

- (r/asktransgender, r/ftm, r/mtf, r/nonbinary)

5. Discord offers searchable communities supporting Trans and Non-Binary people.

- Transpeak - For Trans and Non-Binary people to connect and find resources (28K+ members)
- transfem hangout - For all gender-expansive folks, with an emphasis on trans women (4K+ members)
- Stardust Nebula - Mercury Stardust’s official discord with many community channels (1K+ members)
- Cafe de la Femme - A Trans centered community server focusing on Trans positivity within the discord community (3K+ members)

IV. ACCESSING HORMONES WHEN UNABLE TO OBTAIN THEM TRADITIONALLY

C. Online Support Networks

6. Instagram

- *Trans Women of Color Solidarity Network* - [@twocsolidartynetwork](#)
- *FORGE* - [@forge_forward](#)
- *Trans Masculine Health LA* - [@transmasculinehealthla](#)
- *Lighthouse Learning Collective* - [@hrc_lighthouse](#)
- *Trans Advocacy & Care Team* - [@yourtact](#)
- *Inclusive Care Project* - [@inclusivecareproject](#)
- *Intersex Justice Project* - [@intersexjusticeproject](#)
- *Trans Justice Funding Project* - [@transjusticefp](#)
- *Trans Queer Pueblo* - [@tqpueblo](#)
- *Our Trans Health* - [@ourtranshealth](#)
- *For the Gworks* - [@fortheGworks](#)
- *Trans Health Research* - [@transhealthresearch](#)

7. Online Support Groups for Youth and Parents

- [PFLAG](#) has many support groups for family and friends wanting to support their trans and queer loved ones.
- [Stand with Trans](#) has Zoom support groups for youth and for parents.
- [Campus Pride](#) lists pride student groups at colleges and universities nationwide.

Accessing community resources and support groups is one of the most powerful and loving actions we can take. Trans people have been and are being shut out of healthcare institutions, but there are many community resources to turn to. It's incredibly important to find, share, and create these resources with each other! We all know of something cool or helpful that someone else has never heard of. As a community, we can give ourselves and each other the resources and care we deserve.

IV. ACCESSING HORMONES WHEN UNABLE TO OBTAIN THEM TRADITIONALLY

D. DIY GAHT: Risks and Considerations

You may be considering do-it-yourself hormone therapy (DIY GAHT). DIY GAHT refers to receiving GAHT from a non-medical source (e.g., from friends, relatives, or strangers), and/or taking alternatives to traditional GAHT (e.g., herbal or supplements). When thinking about DIY GAHT, there are several aspects you should consider.

1. Double-Check What You Are Taking

- DIY GAHT generally cannot be guaranteed to have the medication or dosage you expect. If it contains a different hormone, then it may not cause the changes you anticipate or maintain changes from previous hormone usage. If the dosage is different, health conditions can develop (e.g., lower blood pressure, dizziness, blood clots, etc.).

- If you are getting injectable DIY GAHT in a glass ampoule instead of a vial with a rubber top, breaking the neck can cause bits of glass to get into the medication. Use a filter syringe or wheel filter to remove any glass and prevent it from being injected.
- Although most harm reduction programs don't offer drug testing for many GAHT meds, there is a program via Trans Harm Reduction that does this.
- Talk with others in your community who are taking similar hormones to help figure out which sources are safer for your DIY GAHT. **If you start to feel unwell when taking DIY GAHT, stop taking it and seek medical attention.**



IV. ACCESSING HORMONES WHEN UNABLE TO OBTAIN THEM TRADITIONALLY

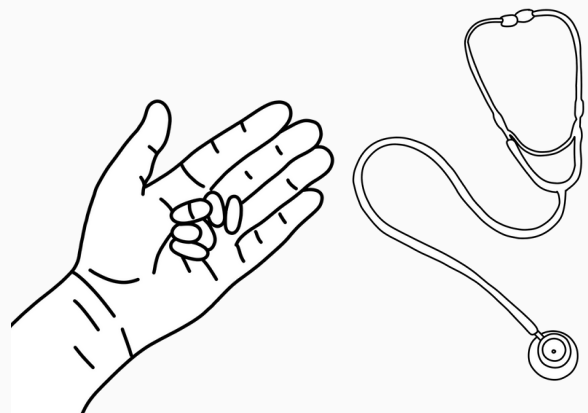
D. DIY GAHT: Risks and Considerations

2. Allergic Reactions and Interactions to DIY GAHT

- Some people may experience allergic reactions to herbal alternatives or supplements for DIY GAHT. Additionally, if you are on other medication, sometimes supplements may interact badly with your medication.
- For topical alternatives (creams, lotions, patches) test for allergic reaction by rubbing in a small area on the forearm or wrist. For ingested/injected alternatives (pills, oils, etc.) try taking a small amount first before the full dosage. For both, if you experience itching on the skin or eyes, a skin rash, hives, wheezing, or swelling of the lips, tongue, or face, do not continue to take the supplement. If you experience stomach pain or cramping, diarrhea, lightheadedness,

nausea/vomiting, or rapid pulse (heart pounding), you could be experiencing anaphylaxis and should seek medical attention.²³

- **If you are taking other medications, check in with your physician if there are any “contraindications” for the medication and the supplement or herb you are taking.** A contraindication is when two medications/supplements cannot be taken at the same time or they will have a negative health effect. If there is a contraindication, try and find another alternative that will work with your medication.



²³ National Health Service. (n.d.). Anaphylaxis. Retrieved from <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/anaphylaxis/>

IV. ACCESSING HORMONES WHEN UNABLE TO OBTAIN THEM TRADITIONALLY

D. DIY GAHT: Risks and Considerations

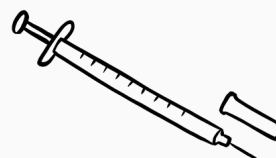
3. Supplies



- If you are injecting DIY GAHT, try and use new supplies every time. Using the same syringe more than once causes the needle to become dull and build up bacteria, which can increase the risk of an abscess (infection under the skin) at the injection site.²⁴ Similarly, get Luer-lock syringes that allow for a needle to be changed between drawing up and injecting. Hormones are suspended in a thick oil and can dull the needle when drawing.
- Sterilize the area where you are going to inject the best you can (e.g., with an alcohol swab, hand sanitizer, or soap and water), and rotate injection sites to also help prevent abscesses.

4. Practice Harm Reduction

- **Reduce pain** - Injections can be painful; here are some ways to reduce the pain. Using new syringes can help prevent damage to the skin and can prevent abscesses. Letting the skin fully dry after sterilizing the area, keeping the muscles warm and relaxed, injecting DIY GAHT at room temperature, breaking through the skin quickly, and not wiggling the syringe while it is in can all help reduce discomfort.
- **Link up with a doctor** - Try and get in to see a doctor to help monitor your hormone levels while doing DIY GAHT. Excess or uneven testosterone can convert to estrogen, increasing the risk of cancer and liver damage. Excess or uneven levels of estrogen can cause anxiety, migraines, and increase the risk of blood clots.



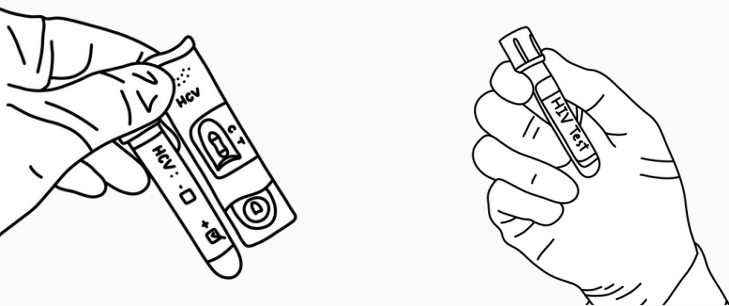
²⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2010, May 21). A patient safety threat - syringe reuse. Retrieved from https://www.cdc.gov/injectionsafety/patients/syringereuse_faqs.html

IV. ACCESSING HORMONES WHEN UNABLE TO OBTAIN THEM TRADITIONALLY

D. DIY GAHT: Risks and Considerations

4. Practice Harm Reduction

- **Be mindful of your medication -** If the DIY GAHT is expired, discolored, or you can see visible particles floating in it, consider getting a replacement. These can all be signs that it could.
- **Avoid sharing supplies -** if you are sharing the needle part of the syringe it can become dull quickly, increasing risk of abscesses. **If you are sharing the needle or the barrel (where the medication goes) there is also a risk of blood exposure, which can increase the risk of HIV, Hepatitis C, and other bloodborne infections.**



E. Medical Tourism: Pros and Cons

Medical tourism is when you travel to another country to access healthcare that is either too expensive or unavailable where you live. Many folks may also travel to other states to access healthcare. For some, this may be the only way to get the care needed from trusted sources.



Potential pros: 

- **Access to care -** If you live in a state or country where it is currently illegal or impossible to get gender-affirming care, then traveling for that care may be the only way to get access.

IV. ACCESSING HORMONES WHEN UNABLE TO OBTAIN THEM TRADITIONALLY

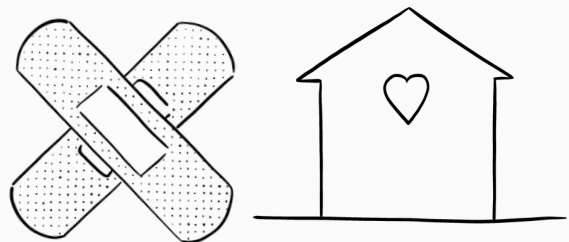
E. Medical Tourism: Pros and Cons

Potential pros: 

- **Cost** – Depending on your medication, you may be able to get it at a less expensive price, and you may be able to get a larger quantity of medication.
- **Availability of medication** – Sometimes there may be supply shortages of your medication, which can result in getting a smaller quantity of medication each time you fill, switching to an alternative medication, or having to go without the medication. Going to another country or state that does not have a supply shortage can help maintain your medication regimen.
- **Quality of care** – Depending on where you live, you may get better care from providers with more experience working with gender-expansive patients.

Potential cons: 

- **Language/accessibility** – If you do not speak the primary language where you are traveling, it may be additionally challenging to get around, understand your provider, or advocate for your health needs.
- **Traveling each time** – Depending on the local laws, you may have to be seen in person to get your medication. This can add up quickly, and in some cases even become too expensive to continue.
- **Continuing care at home** – Some medications can have side effects or may interact with other medications or supplements. If you are seeing a physician outside of your local area, it may be harder to get health support when having side effects or in an emergency.



IV. ACCESSING HORMONES WHEN UNABLE TO OBTAIN THEM TRADITIONALLY

E. Medical Tourism: Pros and Cons

Additional considerations:

- **Plan ahead** – Look up local laws and ordinances around gender identity, map out your itinerary, figure out where you will be staying while you are visiting, and budget extra time and money in case travel is delayed or there are more expenses than you anticipate. Also, verify that you have the correct identification and documentation required for travel to that state or country.
- **Research your provider** – Ask your prescriber about their credentials, any questions you have about your care, if they can communicate with you in your primary language (or what translation services are available), and talk to your friends about their experiences with the provider. Online reviews and testimonials can be made up, so try not to go off those only.
- **If you are moving** – If you decide to move somewhere that will better meet your health needs, ask your current insurance for a travel override to get as much of your medication as possible before the move.
- **In-person vs. telehealth** – You may not need to travel to get your GAHT refill, some local laws may allow prescribing via telemedicine or may only need one in-person visit to transition to telemedicine.
- **Mail-order pharmacies** – Some mail-order pharmacies require that you have an address in the service area to get your medication filled. You may be able to instead get the prescription sent to a local pharmacy for you to have filled, or set up a PO box and use mail forwarding to get your medication.
- **Coupons and discounts** – If you are able to get a prescription but do not have health insurance, or it's not covering it, look up manufacturer coupons or generic coupons (like [GoodRX](#), etc). These will likely make the medication less expensive than just paying for it outright.

V. SELF-CARE AND MONITORING

A. Importance. Of Regular Health Check-Ups

You deserve care! Some of us have shame related to doctors.

But you deserve care whether you go to the doctor every other day or you've dodged the doctor for twenty years, whether you love your body or really don't, whether you have money or don't—no matter what.

Whether you are new to gender-affirming GAHT or you have been on it for years, regular health check-ups help ensure your overall health and well-being. If you are having inconsistent access to GAHT or have lost access, these health check-ups also help navigate some of the side effects of fluctuating hormones.

Health check-ups can help with:

- Making sure your hormone levels are good – If your hormone levels are too low or too high, this can put you at risk for health problems. If you already have other health conditions, this can also make those conditions

worse. By having regular health check-ups, you can get your hormone levels checked and ensure you are staying in a safe range.

- **Detecting health problems before they get worse** – Regular health check-ups can help you identify them early so that they are easier to treat and care for. This includes health problems unrelated to GAHT.
- **Monitoring other health conditions** – If you already have other health conditions that you are taking care of (e.g., diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, etc.) then having regular health check-ups helps you to track and take care of your other health conditions. The next section will provide detailed information on the kinds of tests and monitoring that you should consider when taking GAHT.
- **Access to a health team without having to establish new care** – Some health offices may have longer waitlists for patients who are just starting their care with the clinic. When you have regular health check-ups you avoid that extra wait and, depending on the clinic, you may have the ability to message or call your care team whenever you need to talk about your health. This can save you time and money from going to urgent care or emergency rooms for non-emergency health questions.

V. SELF-CARE AND MONITORING

B. Blood Tests and Monitoring Hormone Levels

This section will share what you should be looking for in hormone levels, some health conditions to screen for when taking GAHT, and other health conditions to take into consideration, whether you are taking GAHT or not.

1. For those on masculinizing hormones:

- **Serum testosterone** – safe range is between 300-1000 ng/dl. Your levels are highest 24-48 hours after you inject.²⁵ If this is too high it can cause irritability, bloating, pelvic cramps, or a return of menstruation.
- **Hematocrit (percentage of red blood cells in your blood)** – safe range 41%-50% (0.41 – 0.50 L/L).²⁶ If this level is too high it can cause headaches, fatigue, and can increase the risk of blood clots, heart attack, and stroke.

2. For those on feminizing hormones:

- **Serum testosterone** – safe range is 30-100 ng/dl.²⁷
- **Serum estradiol (estrogen)** – safe range is less than 200 pg/ml.²⁸
- **Prolactin** – safe range is less than 25 ng/mL.²⁹ This will increase when starting hormones, but will increase less if on spironolactone. High prolactin can result in some milk production in breast tissue.
- **(if taking spironolactone) Potassium** – safe levels are 3.6-5.2 mmol/L.³⁰

3. When is it best to get labs done?

- If injecting, it's best to get labs drawn a day or two before your next injection.
- Taking pills? 6-12 hours after your last dose.
- For patches and gels, it's not as precise, but it is recommended to get them drawn at least a few days after your latest patch application.³¹

25 Boston University. (n.d.). Practical guidelines for transgender hormone treatment. Retrieved from <https://www.bumc.bu.edu/endo/clinics/transgender-medicine/guidelines/>

26 American Red Cross. (n.d.). What does hematocrit mean? Retrieved from <https://www.redcrossblood.org/donate-blood/dlp/hematocrit.html>

27, 28 Boston University. (n.d.). Practical guidelines for transgender hormone treatment. Retrieved from <https://www.bumc.bu.edu/endo/clinics/transgender-medicine/guidelines/>

29 Columbia University Irving Medical Center. (n.d.). Hyperprolactinemia (prolactin disorder). Retrieved from <https://www.columbiadoctors.org/treatments-conditions/hyperprolactinemia-prolactin-disorder>

30 Mayo Clinic. (2022, November 8). High potassium (hyperkalemia). Retrieved from <https://www.mayoclinic.org/symptoms/hyperkalemia/basics/definition/sym-20050776>

31 FOLX Health. (2022, September 27). Estrogen HRT Labs at FOLX. Retrieved from <https://www.folxhealth.com/library/estrogen-hrt-labs>

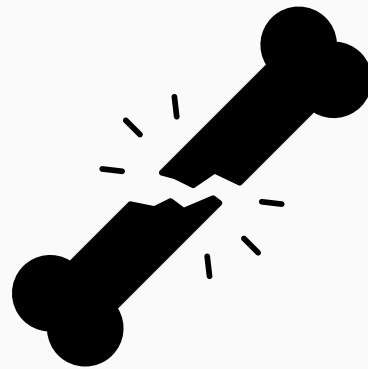
V. SELF-CARE AND MONITORING

B. Blood Tests and Monitoring Hormone Levels

Health screening for conditions related to GAHT^{32, 33}

- **Triglycerides** – Taking gender-affirming GAHT can lead to increases in triglyceride levels which can increase the risk of heart disease and stroke.
- **Cholesterol** – Testosterone can lead to an increase in bad cholesterol (LDL) and a decrease in good cholesterol (HDL) which can increase risk for blood clots, heart attack, and stroke.
- **Blood pressure** – Testosterone can increase blood pressure, and estrogen can decrease blood pressure. Increased blood pressure can raise heart disease and stroke risk, and decreased blood pressure can increase risk for damage to the heart, brain, and other organs from not getting enough blood to those areas. High blood pressure—like high triglycerides—and cholesterol—is very treatable, but starting treatment as soon as needed is better.

- **Weight gain** – Though weight gain alone is not an indicator of health for an individual, those who start gender-affirming GAHT may experience weight gain, which can lead to changes in existing health conditions.
- **Osteoporosis (weakening of the bones)** – There are lots of factors that can lead to osteoporosis, but a few studies have started to look at early osteoporosis experiences for those currently taking estrogen and also those who used puberty blockers as youth. If you are over 50, an early osteoporosis screening can help reduce your risk of bone fractures.



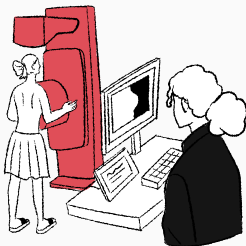
³² Boston University. (n.d.). Practical guidelines for transgender hormone treatment. Retrieved from <https://www.bumc.bu.edu/endo/clinics/transgender-medicine/guidelines/>

³³ Iwamoto, S.J., Grimstad, F., Irwig, M.S., & Rothman, M.S. (2021). Routine screening for transgender and gender diverse adults taking gender-affirming hormone therapy: A narrative review. *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, 36(5), 1380-1389. <https://doi.org/10.1007%2Fs11606-021-06634-7>

V. SELF-CARE AND MONITORING

Other health screenings to consider

- **Chest cancer for transmen and non-binary people**³⁴ – If you're 40 years or older, or have average risk for chest cancer, you should consider a mammogram every 2 years. This applies even if you've had top surgery, since most top surgeries retain some chest tissue shape the chest, differing from mastectomies. In such cases, you may be able to get an ultrasound or MRI instead.
- **Breast cancer for trans women and non-binary people**³⁵ – If you are over 40 and have been on estrogen for a few years, it may be appropriate to start getting mammograms every 2 years. If you have had breast implants, be sure to tell the technician that you have implants when the mammogram is taking place (this can change the way the results are read).
- **Cervical cancer for trans men and non-binary people**³⁶ – If you have a cervix (including if you have had a partial hysterectomy), you should consider cervical cancer screenings every five years starting at age 25. This could be through a provider-collected swab, or a self-swab and use of an estrogen cream can help to reduce discomfort and accuracy of the test.
- **Prostate cancer for trans women and non-binary people**³⁷ – If you have a prostate, you should consider prostate cancer screenings if you are over the age of 55.
- **Front hole (vaginal) atrophy**³⁸ – Though there is not a screening for front hole atrophy, those who are on Testosterone can experience drying and collapsing of the tissue. Collapse can be painful, and drying of the tissue can lead to greater risk for bacterial vaginosis, pain before, during or after front hole sex, and pain or difficulty with urination. However, pain isn't always attributed to atrophy, some experience vulvovaginal or pelvic pain. Use of an estrogen cream, moisturizer, and lubrication (during sex) can help to prevent this pain.



34, 35 Santora, T. (2023, October 19). The confusing world of breast cancer screening for transgender people. Breastcancer.org. Retrieved from <https://www.breastcancer.org/news/screening-transgender-non-binary>

36 National Health Service. (2022, September 1). Should trans men have cervical screening tests? Retrieved from <https://www.nhs.uk/common-health-questions/sexual-health/should-trans-men-have-cervical-screening-tests/>

37 Schmidt, C. (2023, March 24). Prostate cancer in transgender women. Harvard Health Publishing. Retrieved from <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/prostate-cancer-in-transgender-women-202303242905>

38 Fuchs, A. (2022, January 25). Atrophic vaginitis in trans men: A topic unexplored. Drexel University College of Medicine. Retrieved from <https://drexel.edu/medicine/academics/womens-health-and-leadership/womens-health-education-program/whep-blog/atrophic-vaginitis-in-trans-men/>

V. SELF-CARE AND MONITORING

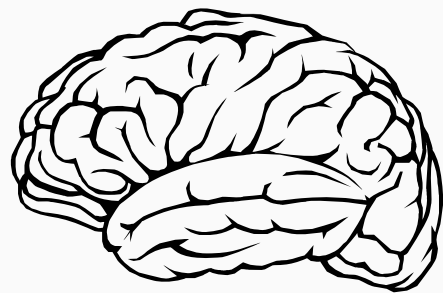
C. Managing Emotional and Physical Changes

You may experience a number of emotional and physical changes when starting, stopping, or while inconsistently taking GAHT. Feeling emotional with changes to hormones can be normal and is a common side-effect whenever hormone levels fluctuate. You may feel increased emotional sensitivity and intensity. You may also feel euphoria, confidence, heightened stress, anxiety, or a combination of these feelings at the same time.

If you are starting hormones, you may experience physical changes to your skin (oily or less oily), your weight may redistribute to different parts of your body, or you may have hair growth or hair loss different from what you've experienced in the past. You may also feel warmer or cooler, your body odors may change, you may have a higher or lower libido, may experience erectile tissue growth, or may stop getting erections.

If you are stopping hormones, you may experience similar physical shifts, and if you have been taking gender-affirming hormones for a while, you may experience menopause symptoms if stopping feminizing hormones, or may start experiencing menstruating if stopping masculinizing hormones.

If you are going on and off hormones, you may experience many of these emotional and physical changes. Being in a transphobic environment and having challenges accessing hormones can further impact your mental health on top of what is expected from hormonal changes. Because of this, it is important to build community and identify resources to help protect your mental health.



VI. LEGAL AND SOCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Stopping problems before they start.

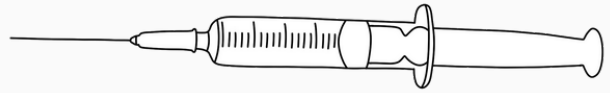
Carrying your hormones and syringes

Your legal risk depends on a lot of factors. Only one of them is whether you are actually doing anything illegal.

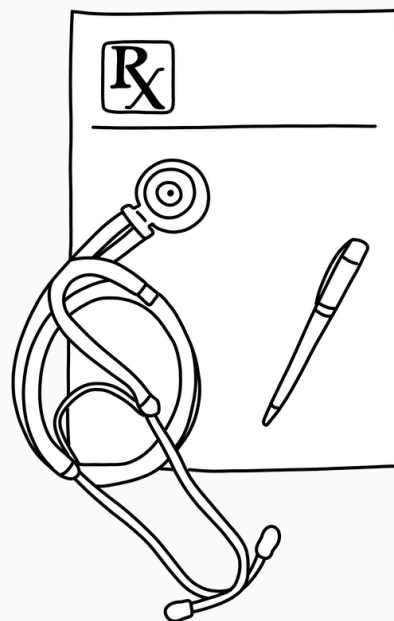
For the most part, you shouldn't get in trouble for just having your hormones or syringes with you, but that doesn't mean you won't. If you have to go somewhere where there is a higher risk of searches and arrests, think about whether you really need to keep your hormones or syringes with you. Can you safely leave them at home or with a friend?

These are places with more risk:

- **Political protests**
- **Airports**
- **Bus stations**
- **Train stations**
- **International borders**
- **Courthouses**
- **Big, loud parties at unlicensed venues**
- **Prisons and jails (even as a visitor)**
- **Police precincts (even if reporting a crime)**
- **Outside late at night in summer, especially in an area police consider "high crime" or where they might see you as "out of place"**



Rules around syringes vary a lot from state to state—if you need to carry them, it's generally safest if you have papers showing you are a syringe services program participant or have a prescription. For hormones, it might also help to be able to show that a doctor prescribed them to you. You can do that by keeping them in their original packaging with a label listing your name as it appears on your ID, or you can ask your provider to write you a letter saying that they have prescribed them. It doesn't have to say why they have prescribed them!



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Preparing for Arrest or Hospitalization

If you are arrested or hospitalized, you can often keep getting your hormones and other medications, but for that to happen smoothly, you generally have to know exactly what you take. Try to memorize the names and dosages of your medications, as well as who prescribes them. Make sure you have one trusted individual on the outside who also has this information and can advocate on your behalf in case you are denied access.



Even if you are in a state that bans trans healthcare, you may still be able to get hormones in jail. That's because the constitution says they have to give you necessary healthcare in jail, and other trans people have been suing jails that take away their hormones. That's not to say it's easy or certain to get hormones inside—it's often a struggle—but it may be possible.

^{39, 40}



If you are arrested, you will lose access to your phone. While you will probably get a chance to make one or more phone calls, you will only be able to call people whose number you know. Memorize the numbers of a few people you can trust to try to help if you get arrested.



If you are going somewhere where you think you might get arrested, like a protest, consider using a marker to write the number of a lawyer and other trusted people who you can call on your arm or leg. If you write it on your hand, it might rub off from sweat, hand sanitizer, or friction. Many protests, especially larger ones, have local Legal Observers from the National Lawyers Guild present at the event. If there are any Legal Observers present, they may have a specific number to give you.

³⁹ U.S. Constitutional amendment VIII. <https://constitution.congress.gov/constitution/amendment-8/>

⁴⁰ Estelle v. Gamble, 429 U.S. 97 (1976). <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/429/97/>

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Preparing for Arrest or Hospitalization

You should also make sure, in advance, that at least one of the trusted people you might call has what they need to help you out. For example, at least one person should have a key to your home, especially if you have pets that could be at risk if left alone for a long time. If you are arrested or detained, it will also be easier for your loved ones to find you and help you if they know the following information:

- **The name on your ID**
- **Your date of birth**
- **Your A number if you have one (most immigrants do)**⁴¹
- **Contact information for other people you would want to know what's happening, such as a lawyer, religious leader, or chosen family**
- **The names and dosages of any medications you take regularly**
- **Contact information for your healthcare providers**
- **Where to find copies of your important documents**

Law enforcement



Knowing your rights can help keep you legally safer. That means, if you follow the tips below, you may be a bit less likely to be convicted of a crime, and it might be easier for you to take legal action against someone for violating your rights further down the line. Knowing your rights won't necessarily make anything better in the moment or keep you physically safe, however, so if you think relying on one of the tips below would put you in more physical danger, please don't use it.

"Law enforcement" refers to people who work for the government and have some sort of legal power to stop, search, arrest, prosecute, take children away from, or physically hurt you. It includes state and local police (cops), child protection services, and corrections (guards). It also includes lawyers who bring criminal cases (prosecutors, district attorneys, attorneys general, and so on). On the federal level, it includes customs (CBP), immigration (ICE), US Marshals, the Coast Guard, the Bureau of Prisons, the U.S. Attorneys, the Department of Justice, TSA, and the FBI.

⁴¹ Petts, J. (2022, October 2). What is an alien registration number (A-Number), and where can I find it? Immigration Help. Retrieved from <https://www.immigrationhelp.org/learning-center/what-is-an-alien-registration-number>

VI. LEGAL AND SOCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

General tips for law enforcement interactions

- **Keep communication with law enforcement to a minimum.** If law enforcement wants to talk to you, get their contact information and talk to a lawyer first. Never answer questions or volunteer information about something that led to your arrest or anything illegal you may have been involved in, even to explain you didn't do it. Those are things to talk to your lawyer about, not the police. If you get taken into custody, say, "I want to talk to a lawyer" right away.
- **Narrate your movements.** It may help keep the officers calm. If someone is recording, it can also make what is happening clearer. And it might help if the officer does something wrong and you need to show there was no reason for them to do it. For example, even if a police officer asks for your license, say out loud, "Okay, I am reaching in my pocket to get my wallet. Now I am opening my wallet to get my license."
- **There is no way to keep law enforcement from getting violent, especially for those of us who are Black, Indigenous, or targeted for other reasons.** But speaking softly, moving slowly, and keeping hands in plain sight may help lower risks a little. It is not your fault if police attack you.
- **Ask friends, family, or bystanders to record from a safe distance.** But be aware, while it's legal to record, the officers may have a strong reaction. Do what seems safest.
- **It's easier to take action about law enforcement doing something wrong if you can identify them by name, badge number, or appearance, or at least by time, date, and location.** Try to remember and write things down if you can. Consider calling a lawyer to help you file a complaint, sue, or report what happened. In some cities, there are civilian complaint review boards or other independent bodies where you can report police misconduct. They are not always very effective, though. There are also internal affairs departments within police departments that investigate complaints. They are also often not very effective. You can complain directly to DHS (Department of Homeland Security) about ICE, CBP, and TSA.



VI. LEGAL AND SOCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

General tips for law enforcement interactions

Learn more in the Transgender Law Center's [Transgender People & Law Enforcement Interactions](#).

If law enforcement comes to your home

- **Do NOT open the door.** Think of police as exceptionally rude vampires. Without a warrant, they can generally only enter your home with your permission. But they will take almost anything you say or do as permission. Even opening the door might be seen as consent. Also, if they see anything in your home they think is illegal, they can arrest you and take it as evidence.
- **Ask what they are there for.**
- **If they say they just want to talk, say you are not interested in talking without a lawyer.** Ask them to slide their business card under the door. If they keep trying to convince you, just repeat, "I don't want to talk without a lawyer."
- **If they say they have a warrant, ask to see it.** They can hold it up to the window or slip it under the door or through a mail slot. If that doesn't work, it's actually better for you to go out to them than to let them in.
 - Check if it was signed by a judge. An administrative warrant is not enough.
 - See if the warrant has the correct date, name and address.
 - Check if it is an arrest warrant, a search warrant, or both.
- **If they have a warrant for your arrest only, you do have to go with them.** It is best for them not to come inside your home to do it. If they come inside, they may use anything they see against you. So it is legally safest for you to:
 - Identify yourself,
 - Say "I am coming out. I am not armed. I want to talk to my lawyer," and
 - Step outside the apartment and allow them to arrest you.

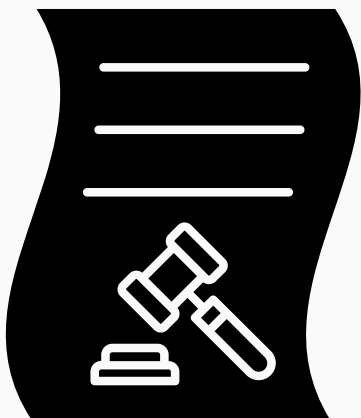
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General tips for law enforcement interactions

Learn more in the Transgender Law Center's [Transgender People & Law Enforcement Interactions](#).

If law enforcement comes to your home

- **If it is a warrant to search your apartment signed by a judge, you have to let them in.** If not, say, "I do not consent to a search." If they force their way in anyway, do not physically resist or get in their way. Repeat that you do not consent to a search, narrate your movements, and watch what they do.



If law enforcement stops you outside on the street

- If they ask you for your ID, you can refuse, but it is much more likely that you will get arrested. **Never show fake or altered ID.**
- If they tell you to turn out your pockets or empty your purse, **say "I do not consent to a search."** If they search you anyway, don't fight back or try to get away.
- Ask if you are free to leave. If they say, "yes," then say, "Okay, I'm going to leave now." As you leave, it might be a little safer if you move slowly, keep your hands in plain sight, and maintain eye contact with officers, keeping careful note of where their hands are placed and if they are reaching for a weapon.
- If they say no, ask if you are being arrested. Say, **"I want to speak with a lawyer. I want to remain silent."** You can also ask what you are being charged with, but they don't have to answer.

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General tips for law enforcement interactions

Learn more in the Transgender Law Center's [Transgender People & Law Enforcement Interactions](#).

If you get pulled over while driving

- Before the officer approaches, turn on recording on your phone.
- Make sure children remain seated. Make sure animals are in carriers or on leashes.
- **When the officer comes, do not move until they tell you to.** Keep your hands on the wheel. Do not get out of the car unless they tell you to get out. Narrate what you are doing.
- **If you own a gun, do not keep it in the glove compartment if you can help it, especially if you keep your registration there.**

The officer may have a strong reaction if you open the glove compartment and they see a gun, even if it is legal and you tell them it's there.

- **If the officer asks if you know why you've been pulled over, you can say you're not sure, because that's the truth.** Even if you were speeding, you may not have been pulled over for that reason.
- **The officer can generally search your car, except for the trunk.** If you refuse to let them search the trunk, they might let you go. Or they might keep you there until they can bring a dog trained to sniff for drugs or until they can get a search warrant. They also might arrest you for a traffic offense they would usually just give you a ticket for. They are allowed to search the trunk of cars they impound.⁴²

Your right to remain silent

You really do have a right to remain silent. You also have the right to say no to being an informant.

Even though most people know they have a right to remain silent, tons of people still talk. False confessions are common.



⁴² Impounding is when your car is taken away from you and legally in the custody of law enforcement because of a violation of a law or regulation.

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General tips for law enforcement interactions

Learn more in the Transgender Law Center's [Transgender People & Law Enforcement Interactions](#).

Why do people talk?

- They are exhausted and just want the interrogation to end.
- They are intimidated and don't think they have a choice.
- They think they're saying something that will get them out of trouble.
- They think the right to remain silent doesn't apply in their situation.
- They're so relieved to find an officer who uses their native language that they want to tell them everything.
- They think they're helping or protecting someone else.
- They're confused and don't really understand what they're being asked.
- They're nervous and want to fill the silence.
- They think the police already know everything anyway and there's no point in dragging things out.

- They figure they have nothing to hide because they haven't done anything wrong.
- They feel guilty and think they deserve punishment.

Why shouldn't I talk?



- If they already had enough evidence to arrest and convict you, they wouldn't bother questioning you.

They are trained, permitted, and encouraged to lie. You cannot trust their promises, reassurances, information, or threats.

- It will make it harder for a lawyer to defend you.
- Police and FBI cannot offer you a deal. Only a prosecuting attorney can offer a deal, and it's best if they do it through your attorney.
- Even totally innocent information may implicate you in a crime in ways you can't anticipate.
- You cannot trust the truth to come out in the end. Innocent people get convicted every day.

Getting locked up is not a great way to make amends if you did do something wrong. It doesn't actually help the person you wronged. It just hurts you and those who love or depend on you.

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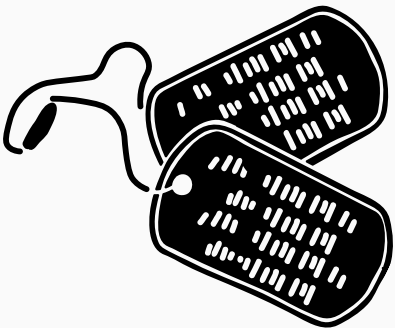
General tips for law enforcement interactions

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Who has the right to remain silent?

Sometimes, people think that they don't have the right to remain silent because of who they are. But anyone in the U.S. has that right. You don't have to be an adult or a US citizen.

Even if you are in the military, you may refuse to answer a question that would incriminate you. The government is not allowed to force or coerce people into saying something that could be used to show they commit a crime. There are only a few situations where the rules vary.



- If you are not a U.S. citizen and you are entering the country, you do have to answer questions to help Customs and Border Patrol decide if you are eligible to enter. And even for U.S. citizens, it's often easiest to respond to routine questions such as the destination, duration, and purpose of your trip when entering the country.
- If you are on probation or parole, you do have to answer questions from your parole or probation officer to help them decide if you are sticking to your conditions. But you still can refuse to answer questions that could show you committed a new crime.
- If you have received a formal, written subpoena from a court ordering you to testify, then you do have to answer questions as the court orders, unless your answers would show you committed a crime.

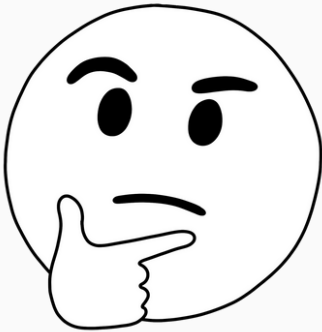


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General tips for law enforcement interactions

Learn more in the Transgender Law Center's [Transgender People & Law Enforcement Interactions](#).

So I shouldn't talk at all?



Remaining silent doesn't mean you can't talk at all. It means you shouldn't talk about what you're accused of doing or anything else that could conceivably be used against you or someone else in a criminal case. And you shouldn't answer questions that you don't understand or that seem related to an investigation.

You will get asked routine booking questions if you get arrested, like your name, date of birth, and address. It's generally easiest to answer these questions.

It's also good to ask for things you need, like medical care or a safer placement if you are in custody. If you are not a U.S. citizen and are being held by ICE or CBP, it is good to say that you fear persecution in your home country if that is true.

If law enforcement notices your hair unit, breast forms, packer, or something else during the search, it's often best to just matter-of-factly explain what it is. For example, if an agent asks about your packer: "I'm a transgender man, and I have a prosthetic penis in my underwear. I have a medical need for it, but I can remove it for the search if you need me to. I'd prefer to do that in private."

What if I decide to talk anyway?

It is not a crime to stay silent. It is a crime to lie to law enforcement. It can also cause serious immigration problems. If you decide to talk, make sure you only tell the truth. If you're not sure or can't remember, don't guess. Don't use sarcasm. Don't show any fake or altered papers or ID.

VI. LEGAL AND SOCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

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Learn more in the Transgender Law Center's [Transgender People & Law Enforcement Interactions](#).

What if I decide to talk anyway?

Law enforcement may pressure you to sign something. Don't trust what they tell you about what it means or what your options are. Read it carefully. If you have even the slightest doubt about what it means, whether you have other options, or whether you want to sign, don't sign. If it's in a language you don't understand, don't sign. Talk to a lawyer first.

Let's look at some examples:

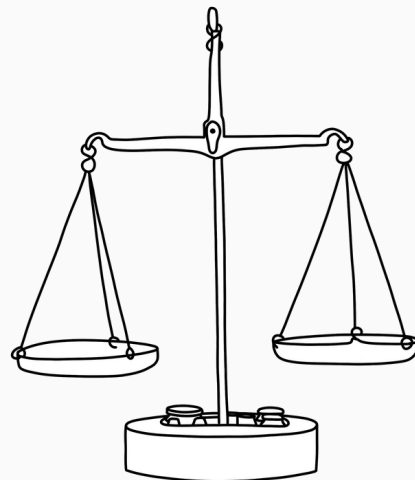
1. "You're under arrest."

Gwen: *The police burst into the hotel room and told me and the other girls they were arresting us for prostitution. I explained that I had sex with the guy, but not for pay. They arrested me anyway.*

Explanation: If the police have already decided to arrest you, you generally won't be able to talk them out of it. Here, Gwen actually gave them a partial confession they can use against her. Before, they might not have had evidence that she had sex with the guy at all; now they do. Their job just got easier.

Legally safer approach: The police burst into the hotel room and told me and the other girls they were arresting us for prostitution. I said I wanted to talk to a lawyer.

Explanation: Now the police are not allowed to question her when she doesn't have a lawyer with her. If they do and she answers, she may be able to keep them from using her answers against her.



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What if I decide to talk anyway?

Law enforcement may pressure you to sign something. Don't trust what they tell you about what it means or what your options are. Read it carefully. If you have even the slightest doubt about what it means, whether you have other options, or whether you want to sign, don't sign. If it's in a language you don't understand, don't sign. Talk to a lawyer first.

Let's look at some examples:

2. "Just a few questions"

Tanveer: *Two people wearing suits rang my doorbell. When I opened the door, they said they were FBI and showed me their badges. It was definitely unexpected! Felt like something out of a movie. They reassured me that I wasn't in any trouble, and they just wanted to ask*

me a few questions. They told me while I wasn't a suspect in anything, I might have important information and not even realize it, and talking to them could help protect public safety. Made me feel important, I guess, and it just seemed rude to say no, so I invited them in. They started asking me about an acquaintance of mine from school. I don't know him that well, but I told them what I remembered—that we met when taking a class together and had seen each other at a couple of parties. Then all of the sudden they were accusing me of lying—saying they had evidence I had known him much longer than I was saying, asking me if I knew that it was a crime to lie to them. They threatened to arrest me unless I became an informant.

Explanation: Law enforcement can make themselves appear friendly and helpful, but even if you've done nothing wrong, agreeing to an interview creates risk. Here, maybe they really did have evidence that Tanveer had known their classmate for longer than they said—it's easy to misremember something like that. Maybe they didn't, but either way, the agents have more leverage over Tanveer now than they did before the conversation started.

VI. LEGAL AND SOCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

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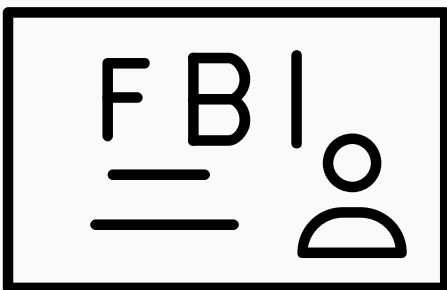
Learn more in the Transgender Law Center's [Transgender People & Law Enforcement Interactions](#).

What if I decide to talk anyway?

Let's look at some examples:

2. "Just a few questions"

Legally safer approach: *Two people wearing suits rang my doorbell. When I opened the door, they identified themselves as FBI and showed me their badges. They reassured me that I wasn't in any trouble, and they just wanted to ask me a few questions. I stepped outside and closed the door behind me.*



Then I said, "Thanks for coming by. May I have your business cards? I can ask my lawyer to call you."

They said, "That's not necessary. You aren't a suspect, but we think you may have information that's important to public safety and national security without even knowing it. We'll just ask a couple of quick questions."

"I would rather not talk without a lawyer."

"Wow, lawyering up that fast? That doesn't look too good for you, you know. We have to ask ourselves why."

"I would just rather not talk without a lawyer."

They said, "Look, we're trying to stop terrorism. Do you want to protect your country or protect terrorists?"

"I would rather not talk without a lawyer."

They said, "You'll be hearing from us again," gave me their cards, and left.

Explanation: Here, Tanveer stayed firm. They didn't give the agents anything they could use against them or anyone else.

VI. LEGAL AND SOCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

General tips for law enforcement interactions

Learn more in the Transgender Law Center's [Transgender People & Law Enforcement Interactions](#).

What if I decide to talk anyway?

Let's look at some examples:

3. "Are these yours?"

Miss June: *I was dead asleep when I heard someone pounding on my door at 5am. I pulled on a robe and stumbled to the door, opening it a crack. There were 5 uniformed police outside my door! They said, "Open up, we have a warrant for the arrest of Jacob Blake!"*

I said, "There's no one here by that name."

"How long have you lived here?"

"Two weeks," I said, opening the door a little wider and gesturing at the boxes I hadn't unpacked yet.

"We have a warrant to arrest someone at this address, and we need to verify he's not here. We're coming in."

I shrugged and said, "Okay" as they barged in.

They went around the apartment pretty quick just making sure no one else was there. But then one of them focused on one of my boxes. "Ma'am, are these yours?" she asked.

I said, "Yes." Then I realized she was pointing to my stuff for silicone injections, which I guess was right on top of one of the boxes. Before I knew it they were arresting me.

Explanation: The police didn't ask permission to come in, and Miss June probably didn't think she was giving it. But she opened the door and said "Okay." A court could count that as consent, which would mean even if they did not have a valid warrant, it was still okay for them to come inside and act on whatever they could see easily.

Legally safer approach: I was dead asleep when I heard someone pounding my door at 5am. I pulled on a robe and stumbled to the door. I kept the door closed and said, "Who's there?"

They said, "Open up, we have a warrant for the arrest of Jacob Blake!"

I said, "There's no one here by that name. Can I please see the warrant?"

VI. LEGAL AND SOCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

General tips for law enforcement interactions

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What if I decide to talk anyway?

Let's look at some examples:

3. "Are these yours?"

They said, "Open up! We have a warrant!"

I said, "Okay, I just want to see the warrant first. Would you mind sliding it under the door?"

"No, if you want to see the warrant you're going to have to let us in or come on out."

"Okay, just a second, I am opening the door to come outside. I don't want you to come inside until I can look at the warrant." Then I grabbed my phone, set it to record, slipped it in my pocket, stepped outside and closed the door behind me. They handed me the warrant. It was intimidating to read it with all those cops staring me

down. But I saw right away they had the wrong address. I pointed it out, and they did have the decency to apologize and leave.

Here, while it was scary, Miss June insisted on seeing a warrant, and because of that the police never came into her apartment at all.

4. "Where are you coming from?"

Vaughn: I was walking on the sidewalk when a cop said, "Hey! You! Where are you coming from?"

"Me? Just the Q train."

"Q train, huh? I need you to open up your bag for me."

"What? Why?"

"Open up your bag right now!"

"Okay, okay, it's open!"

The cop rifled through and pulled out my hormones.

"What's this?"

"That's just my hormones. It's legal."

"Oh really? You got a prescription for this on you?"

VI. LEGAL AND SOCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

General tips for law enforcement interactions

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What if I decide to talk anyway?

Let's look at some examples:

4. "Where are you coming from?"

"On me? I mean no, prescriptions go to the pharmacy electronically."

"You're under arrest."

Explanation: Vaughn probably didn't see any harm in answering the cop's first question. But you have no way of knowing whether something like that could place you at the scene of a crime. Maybe someone just got robbed on the Q train. It's legally safer not to answer. And again, while Vaughn probably thought he had no choice about opening up his bag, a court could say he consented. That means the state could use what's in his bag against him in court, at least if they can make any sort of case for how it implicates him in a crime. It gives the state more leverage and makes Vaughn more vulnerable.

Legally safer approach:

I was walking on the sidewalk when a cop said, "Hey! You! Where are you coming from?"

"Me? Oh, I'm sorry officer, I'm in a bit of a hurry. Am I free to leave?"

"No you're not free to leave. You can answer my question. Where are you coming from?"

"I'd really rather not answer questions. Am I under arrest?"

"Open up your bag and I'll let you know."

"I do not consent to a search."

The officer grabbed my bag out of my hands and went through it, pulling out my hormones.

"What's this?"

"I don't want to answer questions."

"You're under arrest."

"I want to talk to a lawyer."

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What if I decide to talk anyway?

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4. "Where are you coming from?"

Explanation: Sticking up for your rights doesn't necessarily keep the bad thing from happening. Vaughn still got arrested. But now the police and prosecutors really have nothing to use against him. He didn't tell them anything except that he was in a hurry. And he didn't consent to a search, so his defender should be able to keep the contents of his bag out of the case. He is in a better position both to avoid conviction and to take action against the arresting officer.

Facing charges

It may be best to stick with the public defender

If you have been arrested and cannot afford a lawyer, you should get assigned a public defender. Sometimes people wonder whether they should try to get together enough money to hire a lawyer instead. A private lawyer--especially a relatively inexpensive one--will not necessarily be better than a public defender, and might be worse.

Public defenders are overworked and will not have much time for your individual case. But, partly because they are so overworked, those who work within a public defender's office are often either very experienced or supervised by someone who is.

An inexpensive lawyer might be somewhat less overworked, but depending on who they are, they may have less experience and supervision. In some places, it is actually the same people who get appointed as public defenders or get paid by individuals to represent them in criminal court. While definitely not true across the board, many people become public defenders because they are passionate about sticking up for marginalized people caught up in the system.

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Facing charges

It may be best to stick with the public defender

Unless you can afford to hire someone excellent, or the public defender is truly anti-trans and terrible, the public defender might actually be your best bet. Before borrowing or hustling to pay a lawyer, try to get a sense of how experienced your defender is with cases similar to yours, what supervision they have, and what your alternatives would realistically be.

If you decide you want to hire a lawyer and need some financial help to do it, you can try the [Trans Health Legal Fund](#) if you're being criminalized related to trans health or the [Repro Legal Defense Fund](#) if you're being criminalized related to pregnancy, miscarriage, or abortion.

If your defender works for a public defender organization and is not treating you well because you're trans, you can ask to talk to their supervisor. You can explain the issue and ask the supervisor to either get a different lawyer on your case or make sure your current lawyer does better.

Get help for the public defender

If you know of any possible witnesses, give their contact information to your defense attorney.

A lot of recent laws criminalizing trans healthcare are actually very new, and even a skilled and experienced defense attorney may not know much about them. If you're facing charges under one of these laws, reach out to—or have a friend or family member reach out to—a lawyer at one of the organizations challenging the law in your state. Almost every anti-trans health law has one or more lawsuits challenging it. [Lambda Legal](#) and the ACLU are involved in most (but not all) of those lawsuits. Ask those organizations to get in touch with your defender. You might also try the Transgender Law Center's [helpdesk](#). They may be able to share important expertise.

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Get help for the public defender

[Pregnancy Justice](#) may be able to offer similar help if you are facing charges related to pregnancy. [Sero Project](#) or [Center for HIV Law and Policy](#) may be able to help with HIV related charges.

Do not talk!

Don't talk to anyone other than your lawyer (or someone working for your lawyer) about what led to your arrest and what you did or didn't do. That's especially important if you're in jail, where all calls are recorded and listened to, mail is opened and read, and visits are monitored. It is also very common for some people encountered in jail to be informants who may be hoping to hear you confess to something so they can try to cut a deal to lower their own sentence.

Law enforcement may also place listening devices in some circumstances. You cannot be sure of having any truly private conversation in jail, but at least anything you say to your lawyer when you appear to be in private cannot be used against you in court.

Mobilize friends and family

It can be hard to ask for help, but it's also really important. Let friends and family know you are facing charges. They can help in several key ways, which are explained in more detail in the next section. One important piece of support friends and family can give is to come to your court dates. Showing that you have community ties may help you get released while your case is pending, or even lead to a better offer from the state.



VI. LEGAL AND SOCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

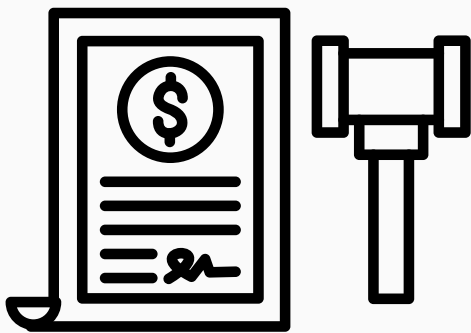
General tips for law enforcement interactions

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Try to get bail posted

If the judge sets money bail, it is worth spending the money to get out, as it will be easier to fight your case from the outside. However, if you are an immigrant, or are on probation or parole, take care before posting bail. If there is a “hold,”⁴³ you won't actually be released even once bail is paid.

If you can't afford bail on your own, and your friends and family can't help, don't give up. Try the Trans Health Legal Fund, Repro Legal Defense Fund, or Bail Funds.



Don't miss a court date!

If you are out, you MUST show up to every court date. Court dates can be inconvenient and frustrating, and it can seem like everyone else is allowed to show up late and misbehave except for you. The truth is, while the prosecutor might show up late, unprepared, or not show up at all with few consequences, if you do it, you will be seen as fleeing. A warrant will be issued for your arrest. The longer it takes for you to come back to court and deal with the warrant, the more likely it is that you will get sent to jail.

For each court date, plan how you'll get there in advance. Set reminders and ask for family or friends to help you. Try to get there early just in case something goes wrong, or the line to get through security at the courthouse is extra long. If for some reason you truly can't get there on time, call or text your defense attorney right away. Let them know what's going on, and follow their instructions.

⁴³ A “hold” refers to an order that prevents someone from being released even if bail has been paid (e.g. outstanding warrant, probation or parole violations, etc.)

VII. CONCLUSION

Every individual has the inherent right to **make decisions about their bodies**, including decisions related to gender-affirming care. Until there is complete and total access to care for **all** TGNCNBI folks, we as a community will fight to keep ourselves and each other safe and healthy.

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RESOURCES

Lighthouse Learning Collective has a [resource repository](#) where you can find microgrants, health resources, and more!

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