

TESTOSTERONE

Why choose hormones?

Many people assigned female at birth want to have a more masculine appearance and presentation in the world. Many wish to take steps for internal consistency and congruence, regardless of how they are seen in the world.

Hormones are one way to increase visible/audible masculinity – a deeper voice, facial hair, increased muscle mass, fat redistribution, etc. These effects are desirable for many people. Hormones can effect some changes that other means cannot. As with everything, hormones carry a degree of risk, as well as their benefits. Read on to learn more about the pros and cons.

Types of Testosterone

Different testosterone delivery methods can result in slightly different results. Working closely with your health care provider will help you determine the best type of testosterone for you. While there are 5 primary choices for FTM+s, the most common method of testosterone delivery is through intramuscular (IM) injection. Testosterone is available in the following formats:

a. Injection (Intramuscular)

- Depo Testosterone - Testosterone Cypionate (in a cottonseed carrier oil)

- DELATESTRYL - Testosterone Enanthate (in a sesame seed carrier oil)

b. AndroDerm (or Testoderm TTS Patch) (transdermal patch)

(Learn more at: <http://www.androderm.com/>)

c. Testoderm (scrotal patch)

(not appropriate/effective for FTM surgically constructed scrotums)

d. AndroGel (gel rubbed on skin)

(Learn more at: <http://androgel.com/main.html>)

e. Testopel® (Bartor Pharmacal) (Pellets)

(Learn more at: <http://rain.prohosting.com/~martydr/untitled.html> and <http://www.pdrhealth.com/>

http://www.pdrhealth.com/drug_info/rxdrugprofiles/drugs/tes1595.shtml)

f. Compounded testosterone cream (available from compounding pharmacies)

(Learn more by calling one of the compounding pharmacies listed in the Online Pharmacy section)

A good resource for learning more about prescription medications is rxlist.com

Online Pharmacies

Strohecker's Pharmacy
2855-A S.W. Patton Road
Portland OR, 97201
Tel: (503) 222-4822
Fax: (503) 222-4868
www.stroheckersrx.com

Kronos Compounding Pharmacy
3675 S. Rainbow Blvd. #103
Las Vegas, NV 89103-1059
Toll-Free 1-800-723-7455
<http://www.kronospharmacy.com/>

Desired effects

Effects differ from person to person. Some effects may be apparent early on while others may take many months or even years. Some items listed here as "desired" may be unwanted or considered negative by some individuals.

- deeper voice
- body shape changes (elongating breasts, narrowing hips, broadening shoulders, increasing neck, finger, feet and other sizes, etc.)
- facial hair
- increased body hair
- increased muscle mass/strength
- cessation of menstruation
- increased clitoral size
- increased libido
- mood changes (calmer, variable, teenager spikes, etc.)
- increased energy
- increased metabolism (for some)
- weight changes (some lose weight, some gain)
- "vaginal" lubrication changes (for some, lubrication diminishes)
- changes in smell (e.g. urine and sweat)

Potential undesired effects

Effects differ from person to person. Some effects listed here as "negative" may be positive for some individuals. Many effects can be successfully reduced/eliminated through lifestyle (diet, exercise, etc.) and/or medical management.

- acne
- increased blood pressure
- increased cholesterol levels
- increased liver levels
- red blood cells changes/polycythemia
- balding/hair loss
- weight changes (increase or decrease)
- body shape changes (elongating breasts, narrowing hips, broadening shoulders, increasing neck, finger, feet and other sizes, etc.)
- increased cardiac risk factors
- changes in smell (e.g. urine and sweat)
- "vaginal" lubrication changes (for some, lubrication diminishes)
- ovarian changes
- increased libido
- increased sweating
- "hot flashes" (in the first few months of use)
- edema (swelling/water retention in the hands or ankles)
- pain at injection site (when applicable)
- mood changes (calmer, variable, teenager spikes, etc.)

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How much is enough? Isn't more better?

Every body is different and needs different levels of hormones in order to be healthy and achieve desired results. Some individuals (and/or their physicians) may wish to start and stay on low doses of testosterone, while others may choose to ramp up or ramp down depending on any number of factors.

Some physicians aim to achieve "normal" male levels of testosterone in their FTM+ patients (which is often desired by many FTM+s, as well). However, some factors may influence the amount, type, or frequency of testosterone administered. Other medical conditions may be the primary reason testosterone dosage may need to be reduced or modified. Conditions such as cardiovascular disease, polycythemia, or liver dysfunction, may influence the safety of administering "moderate" to high levels of testosterone - which may increase the severity of those conditions. Age may also play a role in determining dosage, since some people wish to maintain testosterone levels that are similar to biological men in their age group. Since older non-trans men typically have lower levels of testosterone, some older FTM+s may wish to have similar amounts in their body, as well.

More testosterone is not necessarily better. Changes from testosterone take time and do not automatically speed up with more hormones.

Additional Resources

How to Inject

(<http://www.forge-forward.org/handouts/injection.pdf>)

Just a Little Prick

(<http://www.forge-forward.org/handouts/Needle-anxiety.pdf>)

Both of these handouts focus on how FTM+s and SOFFAs can successfully and safely (emotionally and physically) inject testosterone.

Coping with Polycythemia

<http://www.forge-forward.org/socialsupport/limitlessgender.html#polycythemia>

"Masculinizing Hormonal Therapy for the Transgendered", Sheila Kirk. (Publisher: Together Lifeworks; 1st ed. edition June 4, 1997 - ASIN: 1887796029) Dr. Kirk outlines many comprehensive medical protocols and suggestions for health care providers to follow.

Health Maintenance

Each health care provider may focus on slightly different areas for healthcare maintenance. Discussing with your provider what is important to you, what your risk factors are (i.e. family history, current medical conditions, lifestyle), and what areas your provider would like to track are essential for maintaining good health and a positive working relationship with your provider.

Blood work and routine medical tests

Blood tests:

- Complete Blood Count (CBC)
- Hematocrit (to check for polycythemia which occurs more frequently in people who take testosterone, smoke or have other risk factors)
- Glucose (there is a slightly higher risk of diabetes when taking testosterone)
- Cholesterol levels (cardiovascular risk, including increased cholesterol is a common side effect of taking testosterone)
- Liver function (some forms of testosterone are more likely to increase liver levels. Prior liver risk factors – such as drinking or history of hepatitis – will dramatically impact how testosterone affects the liver)
- Testosterone levels (while testosterone levels don't always indicate how much testosterone to take, it can be a good baseline)

Blood pressure:

Many people taking testosterone experience an increase in blood pressure. Close monitoring in the early administration of testosterone is important. Although medication might be necessary to control elevated blood pressure, there are many lifestyle changes that can decrease high blood pressure. See the Wellness and Risk Reduction section (and talk to your health care provider!).

Pelvic and chest/breast exams:

Many people who have a uterus, ovaries or other "female bits" prefer to not have routine pelvic exams with PAP smears. While taking testosterone can and usually does stop menstruation, it does not stop the need for regular gynecologic (GYN) exams. Certainly, those who have had a complete hysterectomy with vaginectomy are exempt from such exams, but it's important for the rest who have the parts to take care of their whole bodies.

Some physicians (and others) believe there is a higher rate of polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS) found in female-born/bodied people who are taking testosterone. PCOS, and many other GYN conditions, can be identified (and then treated), with regular pelvic exams. For this reason, as well as for general wellness and prevention, please consult with your physician or nurse practitioner about how frequently pelvic exams are advised.

Chest/breast exams are as important as pelvic exams. Pre- or non-operative chests are especially key to maintain regular self examinations and have a health care provider check yearly. Even those who are post-operative may be at risk for breast cancer, just as non-trans men are.

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Wellness and risk reduction

Since testosterone use can increase the risks of some cardiovascular, liver and other conditions, being mindful and taking proactive measures can reduce your risk(s). Some things you can do include:

- exercise
- eat a healthy diet
- moderate (to no) alcohol consumption
- minimal (or no) smoking
- reduction in red meat consumption
- proper use of medication to control medical and mental health conditions
- adequate rest
- stress management
- changes (reduction) in the amount of testosterone (sometimes necessary if liver function levels are elevated, or if polycythemic, or for other reasons)
- giving blood (to reduce polycythemia)