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PUBERTY BLOCKERS FOR YOUTH

Puberty blockers are medications used to delay the onset of puberty. The changes to your body that happen during puberty can be distressing if they are not in line with your gender. Puberty blockers can help relieve this distress. Delaying puberty gives you more time to explore your gender identity before changes happen to your body that can't be reversed.

The criteria for getting a prescription for a puberty blocker are:

- a long-lasting and intense pattern of gender non-conformity or gender dysphoria
- gender dysphoria emerged or worsened with the onset of puberty
- coexisting psychological, medical, or social problems, if any, are stable enough to start treatment
- the adolescent having given informed consent, and the parents or guardians having given consent and being involved in supporting the adolescent throughout the treatment process

Usually an endocrinologist (hormone specialist) monitors puberty blockers and hormone therapy for youth, due to changing needs during adolescence. The endocrinologist can work with your primary care provider for routine monitoring.

The puberty blocker used most often is Lupron Depot. It is given through injection in the thigh every 3 months. This medication must be given by injection because it is inactive when given by mouth. Lupron works by blocking the effect of Gonadotropin Releasing Hormone (GnRH) on the pituitary gland in the brain, which suppresses the pituitary hormones that stimulate the ovaries or testes to produce the sex hormones.

Effects of puberty blockers:

If you were assigned male at birth, puberty blockers will stop or limit:

- growth of facial and body hair
- deepening of the voice
- broadening of the shoulders
- growth of adam's apple
- growth of gonads (testes) and erectile tissue (penis)

If you were assigned female at birth, puberty blockers will stop or limit:

- breast tissue development
- broadening of the hips
- monthly bleeding

In both cases, puberty blockers may temporarily stop or limit:

- growth in height
- development of sex drive
- accumulation of calcium in the bones
- fertility (though contraception is still recommended to prevent pregnancy)

There are no known irreversible effects of puberty blockers. If you decide to stop taking them, your body will go through puberty just the way it would have if you had not taken puberty blockers at all.

Risks of taking puberty blockers: Puberty blockers are considered to be very safe overall. We are not sure if puberty blockers have negative side effects on bone development and height. Research so far shows that the effects are minimal. However, we won't know the long-term effects until the first people to take puberty-blockers get older.

If you have erectile tissue (penis) and think you might eventually want to have a vaginoplasty, talk with your primary care provider or endocrinologist for more information. Vaginoplasty is the surgical procedure that creates a vagina. If you start taking puberty blockers early in puberty you might not be able to have the vaginoplasty surgery that is most commonly used in Canada, later as an adult. There are alternative techniques available, such as the use of a skin graft or colon tissue.

Benefits of puberty blockers: The use of hormone blockers in transgender youth has been shown to support mental health by decreasing anxiety, depression, and thoughts of suicide.

Adapted from TransCare BC