

Why take Hormones?

Some people take hormones when they feel that their body does not match the way they experience their gender. A medical provider can then give them hormones that their body doesn't make and/or they get medicine that blocks the hormones that their body does make. Taking hormones changes your body (sometimes permanently) and can affect your emotions, thinking and behavior. People who want to feminize their bodies may take estrogen and/or spironolactone (which blocks testosterone). People who want to masculinize their bodies may receive testosterone.

What is THInC?

THInC is an abbreviation for Transgender Hormone Informed Consent. This is Howard Brown Health Center's (HBHC) name for the process that helps us provide you with comprehensive information about hormones and ensures that you have informed consent.

Why has HBHC shifted to an "informed consent" approach to accessing hormones and what does that mean?

Howard Brown Health Center believes that people have a right to make decisions about their gender, gender identity and whether they would like hormones. Often in the past, patients were required to get a letter from a therapist stating that they could receive hormones before a medical provider would provide them. HBHC does not believe that being transgender or gender queer is a sign of mental illness. Instead, HBHC believes that people should be provided with accurate and comprehensive information, and supported in making their own decisions about whether to get hormones.

When someone offers "informed consent" it means that they have the cognitive ability and the information needed to make a decision. Our informed consent approach to hormones requires us to make sure that everyone requesting hormones has the cognitive ability to make a decision and comprehensive information about hormones and their effects. In other words, this means that a person requesting hormones must show that they can understand the potential risks and benefits of that choice and that they are able to anticipate how that choice may impact them now and in the future.

Do other providers use a different approach to hormones?

Yes, some other local clinicians or medical providers use a different approach that may require people to demonstrate "lived experience" or get a letter from a therapist before providing hormones. While other providers have chosen to use that model, HBHC has chosen to use an informed consent model and believes that it is the best match for the people with whom we work.

Am I guaranteed to get hormones if I follow these steps?

No. We can't promise that you will receive hormones if you follow the 3 steps outlined here.

Before hormones can be prescribed, we have to make sure that you have the ability to make this important decision and that you understand the information we provide to you about hormones. In addition, your medical provider will need to make sure that a prescription for hormones is safe and appropriate for you and your body.

Will I receive a formal diagnosis? What information will be shared with my insurance company?

If you are prescribed hormones, you will receive a diagnosis of Endocrine Disorder (ICD code 259.9). Unless you specifically request it, you will not receive a diagnosis of Gender Identity Disorder, Gender Dysphoria or Transexualism. Often in the past, patients would receive one of these diagnoses automatically. HBHC does not believe that being transgender or gender queer is a sign of mental illness or a gender identity disorder. Instead, HBHC believes that patients who request hormones are requesting treatment to alter a mismatch between the hormones their bodies are making and the hormones their bodies need to be their gender identity. If you currently have a diagnosis of Gender Identity Disorder, Gender Dysphoria or Transexualism it will be replaced with Endocrine Disorder. If you receive hormones, your insurance company will receive a diagnosis of Endocrine Disorder, and information about when you received hormones and the hormones you were given or prescribed. If the insurance company asks for additional information, your medical provider will contact you to discuss the information you would like to release. If you choose not to release additional information required by the insurance company, the insurance company may choose not to reimburse HBHC for your visit and you may be responsible for those costs.

What if I have already taken hormones?

It depends on where you got the hormones. If you have been prescribed hormones in the past at HBHC you can discuss this with your medical provider. Your medical provider will review your past treatment and educate you about any changes to our hormone consent forms. If your body is able to support a new prescription, your medical provider may offer this to you. If you have recently been prescribed hormones by a medical provider not at HBHC, you will need to follow HBHC's THInC program. HBHC wants to empower its clients to understand all of the effects of taking hormones in an effort to ensure that they are truly making informed consent. Since we are unable to follow the work of outside providers closely, we cannot guarantee that our clients have been supported and educated in the way they deserve. If you have taken hormones obtained without a prescription or "street" hormones, you will need to follow HBHC's standard THInC process.

Do I have to go to therapy to get hormones?

No. HBHC does not believe that being transgender or gender queer is a sign of mental illness. Instead, HBHC believes that people should be provided with accurate and comprehensive information, and supported in making their own decisions about whether to get hormones or not. To ensure that you have comprehensive, accurate and up-to-date information about hormones, you will be required to meet with a THInC Hormone Advocate to ensure informed consent and to create your personalized transition plan. This is not a therapy appointment. If you would like to be in therapy while receiving hormones or would like some help to develop

your transition plan before beginning hormones, you are welcome to request counseling services at HBHC or begin counseling with a therapist somewhere else. You can call (773) 388-1600 to request counseling.

Can I get a letter for hormones from HBHC that I can take to another medical provider?

No. HBHC does not produce letters of permission for hormones for internal or external medical providers. If you need to get a letter for your current medical provider, we can offer you referral for therapists that may be willing to provide such a document.

How do I get started?

Follow the steps. Start by making an appointment with your medical provider at HBHC to discuss the process and/or attend the THInC Hormone Information Group. After you meet with your medical provider (step 1), you'll be asked to arrange a THInC Hormone Advocate appointment (step 2). After your THInC Hormone Advocate appointment, you'll have another appointment with your medical provider (step 3) to review lab work and discuss whether hormones are the right next step for you. The THInC Hormone Information Group can happen anywhere in that process if you'd like to attend.

What is the THInC Hormone Information Group and is it required?

The THInC Hormone Information Group is an optional group at HBHC for people considering hormones. The group occurs every 2-4 months and is free. The group is designed to offer people basic information about the effects of hormones, the cost of hormones, questions to ask before you start hormones, alternative to hormones, common misconceptions about hormones, and the process for accessing hormones at HBHC. Contact HBHC's Trans Health Advocate (773) 388-8904 to reserve your space at a THInC Hormone Information Group.

Can my significant other, friend or relative come to the THInC Hormone Information Group too?

No, not at this time. Currently, the THInC Hormone Information Group is only for people who, themselves, are considering hormones. You can get information in the group that you can take home and share with other people.

How long will this process take?

It depends. Each of the steps must be completed. You'll need to schedule and attend your first medical appointment and then schedule a meeting with the THInC Hormone Advocate. After you've met with the THInC Hormone Advocate, you'll schedule and attend your second medical appointment. The optional THInC Hormone Information Group is offered every 2-4 months. Given the challenge of matching your schedule to HBHC's appointments could mean that the process could take 1-2 months. While that may seem like a lot of time, we believe that it is time very well spent to offer you excellent service and information as you make a sometimes life altering decision.

How much will this cost?

The cost of hormones depends on many things. Costs will vary based on whether you have

insurance, whether your insurance covers hormones and the cost that you pay for medical appointments. The cost of any labs or medical ests and the cost for hormones will vary by person depending on medical conditions and the kinds of hormones that re prescribed. We encourage you to contact your insurance provider to clarify what costs may be covered. Two components of the HBHC hormone process will stay constant. The optional (but encouraged) THInC Hormone Information Group will always be free. Your meeting with a THInC Hormone Advocate will cost \$20.

I'm under 18. Can I get hormones?

Yes, however, a different process is followed if someone under 18 requests hormones. To learn about the process to request hormones if you are under 18 years old, contact Dr. Michelle Emerick (michellee@howardbrown.org) or 773-388-8903. Dr. Emerick can tell you about the process and can also help you introduce the idea to your parent(s) or guardian. HBHC requires the consent of a parent/guardian to prescribe hormones to anyone under the age of 18. Parental or guardian consent is not required for you to call and talk to Dr. Emerick about the possibility of hormones.

Does HBHC offer medical services to delay the onset of puberty?

No. HBHC does not offer these services. We encourage anyone considering these services to consult an endocrinologist.