



PATIENT FACTSHEET

What is it?

When you're born, you are given a gender based on your physical appearance. This is recorded on your birth certificate. Some people grow up feeling that their given gender doesn't match who they truly are on the inside.

If you feel you were given a gender that isn't true to who you are, you are not alone.

There are many people who feel the same way. And, there are resources to help you learn about what it means to be gender diverse (or transgender). You can start with the 'supports' section of this handout.

Why do I feel different?

Feeling different is not easy, but there is nothing 'wrong' with you. About 1 in 150 people are gender diverse. Being gender diverse is a natural part of human diversity. You may feel like the 'opposite' gender, between genders or experience gender in a way that is unique to you. And, just like everyone else, you may be attracted to girls, boys, gender non-binary people, all or neither.

What matters is that you remain true to how you feel and continue to ask for help – especially if you feel uncomfortable or distressed by the gender you were given or feel that you can't express your true gender. This distress or unease is sometimes called gender dysphoria and can be felt when other people see you as the wrong gender, and/or when your gender and body don't feel connected.

Not all gender diverse people experience gender dysphoria. The gender diverse (and transgender) experience is not a mental illness.

What will my GP do now?

Your GP is your first point of call for your healthcare, and you can see your GP with or without your parents. Everything that is said between you and your GP is confidential; this means they cannot share it with anyone else unless you have given them permission.

Your GP will talk to you about your health, how you're feeling and if you want support to take whatever steps you decide are right for you in order to live as your true gender and be recognised by society.

Your GP can give you a referral for a paediatrician – a specialist doctor who works with people under 18 years.

Your GP will ask you about how well you are supported by family and friends, and how you are feeling. You may feel certain of your gender identity, happy in yourself, and that you are well supported by your family, community and school.

You may feel anxious or depressed because you have not been able to tell people about your gender identity, or you have been treated badly because other people consider you to be different to them. In this case, your GP can refer you to a counsellor, psychologist or psychiatrist. These professionals will allow you to explore your feelings and provide extra support and advice if you need it.

Your GP should talk to you about your health openly and honestly. The only time your GP will share confidential information is if someone is hurting you or you are going to hurt yourself; if this happens you and your GP would talk about how to share this information to keep you safe. If you feel like your GP doesn't understand what you're going through, it's okay to change GPs. Contact the support groups to find a trans-friendly GP.

What are my options now?

Some people who are gender diverse need to change the way they look to reflect how they feel inside. This can help with gender dysphoria. If you decide that this is something you want to do, then you will need to see a psychologist or psychiatrist for an assessment. You may then choose to continue to see them for support through this process. Your options may depend on how far through puberty you are:

Puberty blockers

Puberty is the stage in life when your body begins to develop as you grow into an adult. Puberty usually begins anywhere from age 8 to 14 years.

During puberty, people who are given a female gender at birth (with ovaries making the hormone estrogen) develop breasts and start to have periods. People who are given a male gender at birth (with testes making the hormone testosterone) develop a deeper voice, facial hair and other changes.

It's common for gender diverse people to feel anxious about these changes.

Puberty blockers are reversible medications that can temporarily stop these changes. Some teenagers take puberty blockers to avoid the irreversible changes of puberty.

These blockers are most effective if you take them in the early stages of puberty.

Talk to your GP or a paediatrician if you are feeling distressed about starting or continuing puberty. To start puberty blockers, your doctors will need to agree that you need treatment, and depending on your situation your parents or caregivers may also need to agree with your choice.

Hormones

Hormones are a type of medication that can help you develop features that may be typically associated with the gender you identify with.

Taking hormones can help you change your outside appearance to become the person you truly feel you are inside. However, if you choose not to take hormonal therapy it doesn't make you less of the man, women or non-binary person you've always been. Your GP will help you find out about your options.

If you take estrogen you will start to develop breasts. If you take testosterone you will start to grow facial hair and your voice will get deeper.

Some changes take a few months, while others can take several years. Some of the effects are permanent and do not go away if you stop taking hormones. To keep all the body changes, you need to take hormones for the rest of your life.

Hormones change how you look, but there may also be emotional changes, too. You may feel different while you are taking hormones and feel like you need some extra support – see the 'supports' section of this handout, or ask your GP to refer you to a counsellor, psychologist or psychiatrist.

Taking hormones is a decision you will need to think about. You can usually start taking hormones when you are able to make this decision independently, for most people this is around 16 years, but may be sooner depending on your situation.

Your doctors will need to agree that you need treatment, and depending on your situation, your parents or caregivers may also need to agree that you should start hormones. You don't need the permission of family court to start hormone therapy.

Fertility

Hormone therapy can affect fertility; if you think you might like to keep your options open about having your own biological children in the future, talk to your GP or paediatrician about your fertility choices before you start taking puberty blockers or hormones.

Tucking and binding

Tucking and binding are simple ways to express yourself as the gender you identify with if you have already experienced the changes of puberty.

Tucking is used to create a flat front when wearing pants or tight fitting clothes.

Binding is compressing the chest to make it appear flatter, though this can affect your health if you bind all the time. It is not safe to bind with bandages or duct tape as you can damage your skin and rib cage, which can restrict your breathing.

Ensure you find a binder that fits you and is the correct size. For more information visit minus18.org.au

Voice

Your voice changes during puberty. Taking testosterone can make your voice sound deeper. But, if your voice has lowered, taking estrogen won't make your voice a higher pitch; a speech pathologist or voice trainer can help train your voice to sound higher or deeper.

Hair removal

Hormonal treatment that blocks testosterone will reduce facial and body hair. If excess facial hair remains a concern, there are options available to help. Electrolysis will remove unwanted hair and laser hair treatment can further reduce hair growth.

Surgery

Surgery is done to permanently change your appearance. Usually chest surgery isn't done until after you turn 16 years, and genital surgery until after 18 years.

You usually have lived as your true gender for at least one year before you consider surgery. Some people need surgery to relieve their distress, others because it is the right decision for them. All surgery has risks and you should talk these through before making any decision. If you'd like to know more about surgery, talk to your GP or paediatrician.

Changing your name

Many gender diverse people change their names and identity documents to reflect their true identity. Click on the links below to learn more about:

- [Changing your name](#)
- [Changing your gender marker with Medicare](#)
- [Changing your gender marker with RMS](#)
- [Changing your gender on your passport](#)

Where can I get help in an emergency?

Phone triple 0 (000) if you or someone you know is at immediate risk of self-harm.

If you ever feel unsafe at home or at school, contact Kids Helpline (1800 55 1800), headspace (1800 650 890 or headspace.org.au) or QLife (1800 184 527 or qlife.org.au).

What questions should I ask my GP?

Here's a list of questions you may wish to ask:



- What are my next steps?
- Does anything need to change about my health care?
- Can you tell me which specialists I need to be referred to, if any?
- Can you tell me about hormone therapy?
- Can you tell me about surgery?
- How can I find other gender diverse and trans-youth?
- I don't want anyone else to know just yet – will you tell my parents?
- Where can I go for support groups?
- Who can I tell if I'm being bullied at school?
- What can I do if I don't feel safe at home or at school?
- Could you check the information and resources on HNE Healthpathways?

How do I talk to family and friends?

Talking to your friends and family about being gender diverse or transgender isn't easy. Speaking to a counsellor can give you some ideas and strategies for starting a discussion. You can also see the 'supports' section for more help.

If you would like your parents or family to know, there are resources to help them understand better. Your feelings may come as a surprise to them and getting their own support will help them to support you.

If you feel like your school is not supporting you, speak to your GP or counsellor. Remember – you are not alone, and there is help available.

If you feel like people at school are bullying you because you are gender diverse, tell your GP or counsellor. You can also contact Kids Helpline (1800 55 1800), headspace (1800 650 890 or www.eheadspace.org.au) or QLife (1800 184 527 or www.qlife.org.au). It's important to ask for help before the situation gets worse.

What will my GP do in future?

Your GP will see you regularly to check your ongoing general health and wellbeing. Your GP will also be involved in your care if you are taking medications or thinking about transitioning to match your gender identity.

What supports are available?

Support groups

- Newcastle Headspace LGBTQI and social support groups 12+ years: phone (02) 4929 4201
- Maitland Headspace LGBTQI and social support groups 12+ years: phone (02) 4931 1000
- Lake Haven Headspace LGBTQI and social support groups 12+ years: phone (02) 4394 9100
- ACON: phone (02) 4962 7700
- Gender Help for Parents Support group for parents and caregivers: visit genderhelpforparents.com.au or facebook.com/genderhelpforparents

Public specialists

Ask your GP for a referral if you would like to see a public specialist with experience in transgender health.

Private specialists

Ask your GP for a referral if you would like to see a private specialist with experience in transgender health. Counsellors, psychologists and psychiatrists that see young people mainly work in the private sector. You may need to ask your parents before you see a private specialist.

Telehealth

Ask your GP if you can access care using Telehealth.

Mental health services

Contact the Mental Health Contact Centre: phone 1800 011 511