

## What do I need to know?

There is a lot of talk these days about the safety and use of puberty blockers (sometimes called suppressors), and whether children and young people should be able to access them as part of gender affirming care. This has led to heated debates and some mis-information to spread, and with social media it spreads fast.

So what are the main questions?

- What is gender-affirming care?
- What are puberty-blockers?
- How do they work?
- Do they help?
- Are they safe?
- Are their side-effects
- Are they reversible

These are all extremely valid questions, and when we are talking about the care of children and young people, we of course, want to ensure we know the answers. So here is what we know.



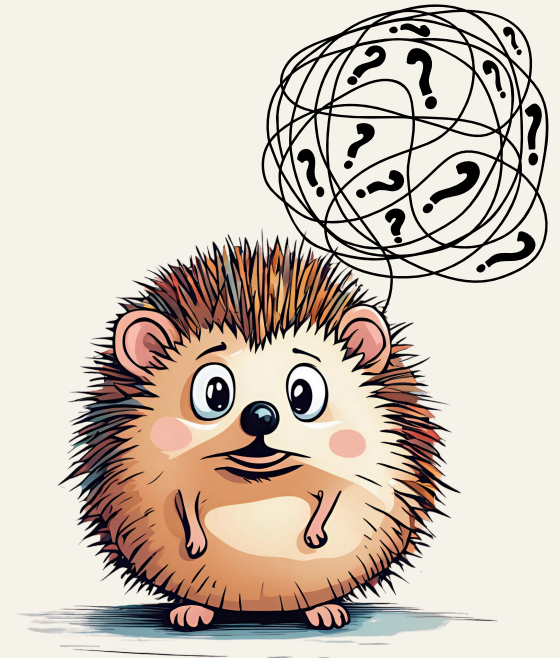
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# Puberty Blockers



## What are they, how do they work and are they safe?

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# What is puberty?

Puberty is the process in which a child or young person begins experiencing a number of changes as part of the aging process towards physical maturity. Some of these changes includes changes to sex characteristics that can be hard, or even impossible to change at a later date. Some of the changes experienced may include, breast and areola enlargement, uterine development, clitoral growth, penis and testicular growth, development of body hair, development of facial hair and vocal changes. For a transgender young person, a lot of these changes can be unwelcome, dysphoric and distressing.

# What is gender-affirming care?

Gender-affirming care is really any form of care that supports and affirms someone's gender. This isn't restricted to trans or gender diverse people, but can include anyone. A cis man who is developing breast tissue (gynecomastia) may have surgery to remove it, hormone replacement therapy for menopausal women, some counselling, even Viagra could be considered gender-affirming care.

# What are puberty blockers

Puberty Blockers are quite simply a medication that suspends the onset of physical changes that take place during puberty, by blocking hormones such as oestrogen or testosterone. Originally developed for precocious puberty, where a child hits puberty at a too young of an age, they have been used to delay the onset of puberty in gender diverse young people.

# How do puberty blockers work?

Puberty blockers work by stopping the release of hormones that cause the onset of puberty, such as testosterone and oestrogen. They do this by blocking receptors in the pituitary gland, which prevents the release of luteinizing hormone (LH) and follicle stimulating hormone (FSH). These hormones normally signal the gonads (ovaries or testes) to produce sex hormones and by preventing this, it will suspend the development of certain gender specific organs, such as sexual and reproductive organs.



# How do they help trans young people

Puberty blockers afford a young person time to develop their understanding of their identity. The pause it places on the development of things such as breasts, testicular development etc, can ease feelings of gender dysphoria. In addition, studies have shown that there is a notable decrease in suicidal ideation(1) and have shown in another (2) to be important in the support of transgender young people. Puberty blockers can then be used alongside things, such as therapy, to support the young person.

1- <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7073269/>

2- <https://acamh.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/camh.12437>

# Are puberty blockers safe?

As mentioned earlier, puberty blockers, or suppressors, have been used to treat precocious puberty for decades. There have been studies completed on the impacts. Studies have shown there is no short term impacts on things such as psychological development. Longer term studies have shown that there may be impacts to a persons bone density for longer term use. There have also been questions raised as to impacts on fertility, however, evidence shows that while they are using puberty suppressors, they will not have developed to a stage of fertility, however, after stopping, fertility remains unaffected.

# Are they reversible?

Puberty Blockers are a temporary suspension of the hormones that develop the sex characteristics in a young person and are completely reversible. They also have the benefit of the young person, when they get to the stage where they may want to medically transition, cross-sex hormones can be given, instigating puberty towards their gender.

# How do I support a Transgender young person

Gender exploration is a natural part of a young persons development, the most important thing is to approach it without judgement or shaming. Be respectful of the young persons choices surrounding their identity and ask them what they are experiencing and what they feel they need. A lot of useful information can be found at Mermaids, a charity for supporting gender diverse young people and their families.