

Non-Medical Gender Affirming Care

To transition can mean many things to different people. Here are some of the ways you can affirm your gender that is not hormonal therapy or surgery.

A lot of people seem to think that you have transitioned “completely” only after going through medical interventions via both surgery and gender affirming hormone therapy – in truth, there are many non-medical ways to affirm your gender. Here are some of them.

Pronouns

On the journey of discovering yourself, finding out the area(s) in which you are comfortable sitting on the gender spectrum is an important milestone. This can also help you understand how you want to express yourself to the people around you. In some cultures where languages have gendered pronouns (such as in English), this might be how you discover that the one people are using for you might not fit.

Here are some pronouns that people use:

He/Him/His = Traditionally masculine pronouns

She/Her/Hers = Traditionally feminine pronouns

They/Them/Theirs = Gender neutral pronouns. Used in a sentence “They dont want ketchup with their fries”

There are also neopronouns – pronouns that are created with the context of the language it is spoken in but is usually not officially recognized. Neopronouns are gender neutral.

And were created usually for these reasons:

- Want to avoid singular “they” being confused with plural “they”, although this is becoming increasingly uncommon as singular they/them becomes more and more recognised in standard English.

- Find that neopronouns express something about them or their gender identity that they/them does not.

- Feel more comfortable using neopronouns over they/them, for any reason.

- Do not feel that singular they fits their experience.

- Do not like how they/them sounds when used to refer to them.

- Used intentionally as a way to rebel against the gender binary.

Here are some examples of neopronouns

xe/xem/xyr – pronounced “zee/zem/zeer”. Used in a sentence: “Xe doesn’t want ketchup with xyr fries.”

ze/hir/hirs – pronounced “zee/heer/heers”. Used in a sentence: “Ze doesn’t want ketchup with hir fries.”

fae/faer/faers – pronounced “fay/fair/fairs”. Used in a sentence “Fae doesn’t want ketchup with faer fries”

Take note, that some people are comfortable with only one whereas others might use multiple eg: He/Him/They/Them

Name

Selecting a new name(or choosing to stick with your old one) can be an incredibly reflective experience as you ponder on how you want to be referred to from now on. Some people choose to continue using the name they were given at birth, some choose to add a feminine/masculine/neutral expression to it eg: Jessica to Jesse, while others get a new name altogether.

Think about what a name means to you, you can look up names with meanings, with natural elements such as water or fire or even just come up with something on your own. Remember, you can always change it later!

Clothing

Even though clothes serve no purpose in being gendered, it can be incredibly affirming to finally shop in the section that fits your gender identity. Take heed and be kind to yourself though as clothing brands are manufactured to fit stereotypically average gendered bodies and it will take time to find a brand that has sizes and styles that fit you. This is not a trans specific issue and more like an issue with the fashion industry as a whole.

Oh and it’s worth remembering that while you are transitioning, your body will be changing which means your measurements will as well. Therefore, it might be wise to hold off on buying clothing that’s on the pricier side till further along in your transition journey.

Be patient, be kind and practice having fun with styles – try clothing that is out of your comfort zone, it can help you understand yourself a lot better.

Trans feminine: Voice Training

While testosterone can help trans men in achieving a more “traditionally masculine” voice by lowering it,

trans feminine individuals will need to rely on voice training to achieve a more stereotypically “feminine” voice.

This is done through vocal training such as adjusting your pitch(how high or low your voice sounds), prosody(how you emphasize certain words by adjusting the loudness of your voice or the pitch of your voice) or resonance(the quality of the voice – its breathiness, raspiness, whether it is

spoken in front of your face or behind your face etc).

The methods of achieving successful voice training is unfortunately a huge topic in of itself and cannot be discussed completely in this article. There are however good resources online such as [One Weird Trick](#) and specific reddit threads such as [this one by adiisvcute](#). Note on reddit: Reddit is a mostly uncensored public forum, it may contain misinformation as well, so be vigilant in identifying them.

Another method is to go through a vocal coach. Vocal coaches that understand the trans experience and trans voices are rare though, more so in Asia Pacific. There are international vocal coaches who are open to coaching through video calls but it can be on the pricier side.

Trans feminine: Hair Removal

Having facial hair is unfortunately one of many ways that society reads as particularly masculine – despite the fact that many cis women themselves have facial hair. Regardless, transfeminine individuals may have the desire to remove facial hair. Here are some of the common options:

Shaving: The process of cutting hair, it is painless and can be done frequently but does not retain hair removal for long, you will usually need to shave every 2 to 3 days and even daily for some. Shaving can also cause ingrown hair; where hair grows beneath the skin rather than above it.

Waxing: The process of pulling hair from the root in batches using a waxing strip (a strip containing a sticky substance), it can be slightly painful if done on an area with a lot of coarse hair but it keeps hair off longer and hair comes out less coarse and thick. You can either do waxing at home on your own or at a salon. You usually need to wax every 2 to 4 weeks

Epilating: The process of removing hair from the root using what's called an epilator; an electronic device that plucks multiple hairs simultaneously. Epilating has similar benefits as waxing but can be slightly more painful to some people.

Intense Pulse Light: Also known as IPL, it is a semi permanent method of hair removal that sends varying wavelengths of light into the hair root, killing it and slowing down its growth. IPL needs to go through the melanin of the hair root through the skin so someone who has dark skin will not be able to go through IPL (use YAG laser instead). It also requires multiple sessions (usually 2 – 3 weeks) to be effective and lasts for 3 – 6 months before hair returns starts to grow though the hair thinness and hair growth rate can be permanently affected.

Diode or nd:YAG Laser: Lasers are semi permanent methods of hair removal. Diode laser uses a similar method of hair removal to IPL except that it uses different wavelengths of light. Whereas nd:YAG (which stands for neodymium-doped yttrium aluminium garnet) laser targets the hair through the skin cell and is usually the method recommended for darker skin.

Electrolysis: Electrolysis works by inserting a thin wire into each hair follicle and sends an electric current to the root, killing it. It is the only permanent hair removal method but the downside of it is that it is a time consuming procedure and is the most costly method of hair removal.

Trans feminine: Tucking

Tucking is something that assigned male at birth (AMAB) bodies can consider doing, and is the act of “tucking” in your scrotum and penis to create a flat silhouette in your genital area hence creating a shape that some people will find more comfortable or aesthetically pleasing. Though tucking can ease a transfeminine person’s bottom dysphoria (having dysphoria about your genitals), it can be done by anyone for any reason.

How to Tuck:

Tucking involves making use of the [inguinal canals](#), all bodies have this. We have one on the left and one on the right. For pre-pubertal AMAB bodies, it was where the testes reside.

The idea behind tucking is to put the testes back into the inguinal canals with gentle upward pressure (this should never hurt though there might be mild discomfort) and to pull the scrotum and penis back to fit in between the legs.

You then keep everything in place by closing your legs and putting on either tape (medical tape only or tape designed for transgender use), a gaff or 2 pairs of tight panties. Though it is tempting to go as tight as possible, tucking should never hurt. You need to find the perfect balance of tight but not too tight. If it hurts after a while, immediately loosen it or it can cause long term damage. It should also never be worn more than 24 hours.

If you want to read up more about tucking, check out this [hilariously written guide](#) from Vice.

Trans feminine: Breast forms & Padding

Another method of getting a more traditionally feminine silhouette is to give the appearance of an hourglass figure. Yes, society’s expectations of beauty standards need to be diversified but it can be euphoric and gender affirming for some people to follow this traditional expectation. Bra inserts are available in lingerie and underwear shops and they are used to fill out a bra either by adding onto existing breast tissue or with the intention to fill the entire bra cup.

The hips and butt can be accentuated by adding padding where it’s needed, these are usually made from foam or silicone and can be used with shapewear to give the appearance of wider hips and a bigger butt. Similarly, a corset can be used to give the appearance of a narrower waist.

Trans feminine: Makeup

Makeup is a huge topic and if we were to discuss everything about it, it would probably be the length of a book. Instead, this article will focus on makeup that is specific to transfeminine people.

Concealer

Useful to hide any facial hair that you dislike the appearance of. Opt for a pinker colour for fairer skins (pink opposes a greenish hue which is what facial hair comes across as) and a more orangey peach colour (if facial hair comes across as a bluish hue) for tanner skins. It is best used with a foundation layer on top of the concealer to blend it all together.

Foundation

Finding a matte, full coverage foundation is best if you are still in the process of removing facial hair as more dewy foundation can give your skin a cakey appearance. Remember to apply setting powder after with an old fashioned powder puff, this helps give the smoothest texture possible.

Hairlines

A quick fix for hairlines that you feel are showing too much skin (usually due to hair loss) will be to use either eyeshadow or eyebrow makeup. Opt for a colour that is lighter than your hair, so if you have black hair, go for a lighter brown. And use an eyebrow brush to give it a hairlike appearance.

There's a lot to learn when it comes to make up, so take your time with it and practice at home, whenever you are able to. Just like with clothes, it takes a while to find exactly what suits your style.

Trans masculine: Binding

Binding is a way of helping a person's chest look more traditionally masculine. This is done by flattening the chest using a tight tank looking top called a binder. Other alternatives include using tape that is specifically meant for binding such as TransTape or KT Tape, a sports bra or a compression top.

To pick a size for your binder, measure your shoulder and the biggest part of your chest, these 2 measurements are usually enough in getting the adequate size. Picking the right size is incredibly important. You might feel like you want the tightest binder possible, but this can lead to pain and can even damage your body when sometimes going a size bigger can give the same effect. This will also ensure you are able to use your binder throughout the day.

To put a binder on takes practice. You might want to step into the binder and pull it up or go through it from over your head, give both a try to see what fits. You will then want to adjust your chest by flattening it towards your armpits on both sides. Check how it looks in front of a mirror from all angles. If it doesn't look right, readjust and try again. Just take note that depending on your body shape, you may not be able to achieve total flatness and that is completely fine as it can look like pecs.

It will feel tight the first time, make sure you are able to take a deep breath comfortably and bring a tight sports bra with you in case you need to take the binder off while you are outside. Practice wearing it for longer and longer periods as you do it, but do not exceed wearing it for 8 hours. Removing it the first time will also take some practice, a good idea will be to have a trusted friend with you in case you get stuck.

Here are other tips to be aware of:

- Do not wear your binder while you are sleeping
- Do not work out while you are binding as you will need to breathe more and move around more at this time.
- Listen to your body, if there is any pain, remove the binder immediately.
- Stretch after removing your binder.
- Always keep your binder washed and cleaned

- Bind less if you are planning to have top surgery as this can affect your skin elasticity and have surgical impacts.
- Do not bind your chest with duct tape, plastic wrap, ace bandages or anything that is not intended for binding. These things are meant to keep things in place and can cause severe damage to your skin and bones.

Trans masculine: Packers

A packer is a phallic-shaped object that is usually made of silicone and is used to create a bulge in your pants(also known as packing). Packing is an individual choice, some people get relief from gender dysphoria while packing, others find that it makes it worse.

There are a few kinds of packers:

Pack Only – creates a penis looking bulge in your pants

Pack & Pee – Along with a bulge, you can use this to stand and pee, also known as a Stand-To-Pee (STP) Device.

Pack & Play – Along with a bulge, a rod can be inserted to this packer for sexual penetrative play.

Pack, Pee & Play – A bulge, a STP device and a rod can be inserted for sexual penetrative play.

Deciding on which packer to use is dependent on your personal choice, how it looks in your pants, what you plan to do with your packer and affordability.

While wearing a packer, it is important to wear snug underwear or undies that are specifically designed to hold a packer. Equally important, is to keep your packer clean regardless of what you need to use it for. This also ensures that it lasts longer.

If you plan to get a STP device, practice using it often and in a safe space.

To get a more in depth look at packing and how to create your own sock packer check out [APTN's Look Better Feel Better Guide](#)

Conclusion

While society has wrongfully placed unrealistic expectations of beauty standards on people, it can be extremely euphoric and gender affirming for some to follow these expectations. Just remember that none of these things are gendered – *people are gendered*. You don't need these things to look good nor does it invalidate your gender identity in any way.

Note: APTN has a video on Non-Medical forms of gender affirmation including on binding, packing, voice therapy, laser hair removal, and tucking/breast pads.