

I ♥ My Chest

A chest health resource
for trans folk

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I Heart My Chest is published by **QMUNITY**, with the valuable assistance of a diverse team of volunteers on unceded Coast Salish land.

Language is always changing. We've tried to make this resource inclusive, but if you have feedback about language or content for future editions, please contact

education@qmunity.ca

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I ♥ my Chest

Taking care of ourselves and our chests can involve eating well, staying active and getting periodic health check-ups in a setting that feels respectful and caring. It can also mean, whenever we can, surrounding ourselves with people who are inclusive, respectful and loving to us, our gender identities and our bodies.

For some, loving their chest means binding carefully so as not to inhibit breathing or cause injury. For some, it may mean having surgery to create breasts or to create a flat chest, and steering clear of drugs and foods that interfere with healing. For some, loving their chest may mean choosing clothes that express their gender identities rather than the sex assigned to them at birth. Loving and caring for ourselves can be a powerful way to resist transphobia, transmisogyny and queerphobia.

'I Heart My Chest' is a resource to promote chest care among trans folk, created by **QMUNITY** staff and volunteers, with the invaluable assistance of the Health Sciences Association, Prism, and a team of volunteer advisors with lived and/or professional experience. It addresses topics including choosing a service provider, binding, pads and forms, bra selection, hormones, surgery, emotional well-being, cancer screening and prevention, cardiovascular health, and nutrition.

Every person has unique experiences and definitions of health and well-being, as well as their own physical, financial, social, and mental barriers to achieving it. As such, some of the content of this guide may not feel right for you, and we welcome your feedback for future edits. This guide is a starting point, and we encourage you to explore your health options with trans-competent health care providers if available. We recognise that language is contested, culturally-contextual, personal, and evolving, and that language that feels right for one person may feel wrong for another. This resource was written with the intent of inclusivity. However, we welcome any suggestions for more inclusive language for later editions. To do so, contact us at: education@qmunity.ca!

Some terms that are used in this resource include:

Trans: ‘Transgender’, ‘trans’ and ‘trans’ are umbrella terms that include a wide variety of identities. They are used to describe the continuum of individuals whose gender identity and expression, to varying degrees, does not correspond with their sex assigned at birth, or does not conform to society’s assigned gender roles and expectations. It is also important to note that while this resource uses ‘trans’ as an umbrella term to refer to all non-cisgender folk, it may not feel culturally appropriate for everyone.

Two-Spirit (2-Spirit): A term used by some North American Aboriginal folk to describe people with diverse gender identities, gender expressions and sexual orientations. Many Aboriginal communities have traditionally had two-spirit people who are visionaries, are considered to be blessed, and are regarded as spiritual advisors. Unfortunately, due to colonization, many Aboriginal people have lost this part of their cultural history. Now, 2-Spirit people may experience discrimination and violence within their own communities. This resource uses the term ‘trans’ to refer to all gender diverse folk, however it is important to note that 2-Spirit is a culturally specific term and that not all 2-Spirit folk identify with trans as an umbrella term.

Cisgender: Identifying with the same gender that one was assigned at birth.

Ciscentric: Behaviour that others trans folk, makes them invisible, and treats their needs and identities as less important than those of cisgender folk.

Transmisogyny: Transphobia directed at trans women and transfeminine folk, that is steeped in sexism and attempts to reinforce male power and privilege.

FTM Spectrum: Generally used to refer to anyone assigned female at birth, but who identifies or expresses their gender differently, often as a man, all or part of the time.

MTF Spectrum: Generally used to refer to anyone assigned male at birth, but who identifies or expresses their gender differently, often as a woman, all or part of the time.

Trans-competent: A person with the knowledge and skills to be able to deliver services effectively when working with trans folk.

Trans-inclusive: In the context of this resource, a person or service that provides services that are fully accessible to trans folk, and that works against ciscentrism.

For a full glossary of queer and trans terminology, please visit
www.qmunity.ca

Choosing a service provider

Support systems can help us keep feeling good about ourselves. When we feel good about ourselves, we feel, and are, more able to make healthy decisions. Support systems can include:

- Friends, allies, families, clients and partners who treat you with the respect and love that you deserve.
- Service providers, including medical service providers, therapists or counsellors, and social workers who are trans competent and inclusive
- Spending time with social support groups and friends in the trans community who share some of your experiences who can help in reducing feelings of stigma and isolation.

Choosing a service provider who is trans-competent can be difficult and intimidating. Some folk have had negative experiences with health professionals that make them reluctant to take a chance on a health professional again. Many people are not confident that a health service provider will understand their needs. Most of us are exposed to public health messages that are mostly ciscentric; this can lead to missing out on vital health information. Some trans folk have unique risk factors for breast cancer and cardiovascular disease, and it is important that they are not limited by chest health promotion that renders them invisible.

Calling or emailing ahead, and/or making an initial visit to ask questions are some ways to find service providers who will give you the trans-competent care you deserve. You might feel more comfortable doing this with a trusted support person.

Some starting questions that might help you gauge competency of care include:

- How many trans clients have you worked with, and for how long?
- What has most informed your practice with trans people?
- What is your experience, and what are your policies and practices regarding referring trans folk for surgeries and other treatments?

- Will any substance use, involvement in sex work, and/or mental health issues affect my ability to obtain hormones or surgeries from you?
- If you are not currently aware of trans health care needs/issues, are you willing to consult medical guidelines established by the Transgender Health Information Program to provide appropriate trans health care?
- What washrooms are available on site? (e.g. Gendered? Single stall? Do they require me to ask for a key?)
- Are gendered questions a part of the intake process or admin, and, if so, do I have options other than the male/female binary for my responses?

You may be able to get recommendations from a trusted peer. If you aren't in contact with other trans folk, you might be able to make connections through local social and support groups. Places that can help you find these support groups include: **QMUNITY**, Prism, The Transgender Health Information Program, The Catherine White Holman Wellness Centre, WISH, PACE, HUSTLE, Directions, or a trans, 2 Spirit or LGBTQ organization near you. If someone you trust has used a service, they may be able to tell you about that service provider's approach, style, and attitudes towards trans folk.

- There may be an online forum based in your area where trans folk share information and resources related to health care.
- LGBTQ centres such as **QMUNITY**, and any trans-specific service providers such as the Transgender Health Information Program are likely to have a list of local trans-competent service providers they can refer you to, and may offer services such as counselling and some medical services for free or at sliding scale cost.
- On-site at your prospective health provider's premises, you can look for rainbow or trans pride stickers or trans health literature as signs of inclusiveness, or ask in person.
- If you are already in contact with one type of trans-competent service provider, such as a doctor or counsellor, they may be able to refer you to other types of trans-competent service providers in their network.

Receiving the most qualified and respectful care possible is important. It can make a huge difference in whether you feel comfortable going for potentially life-saving health check-ups, and in your chances of benefiting from ongoing counselling, naturopathy, acupuncture or other valuable services. This may mean switching from one provider to another if you do not feel that the one you are seeing is right for you. If you feel comfortable doing so, you may want to discuss your reasons for wishing to change service providers with your health care professional, whether that is in person, over the phone, or through an email or a letter. With your feedback, and their own efforts towards increasing their trans-competency, a provider may be able to improve their work with you to better meet your needs; however, in some client-service provider relationships, you will benefit most from moving on to another.

Working with a service provider you trust can help in avoiding situations where you feel a need to withhold information that may impact the services, referrals and recommendations that they provide. Experience with service providers who don't meet your needs can be frustrating and emotionally draining, and can make the thought of looking for better ones discouraging. However, in many places trans-competent and -inclusive service providers can be accessed.

Binding

Binding refers to the process of using a purpose-built garment or other device usually worn under clothing to compress the chest into a flatter shape. This is done by some folk who want a flatter chest but have not yet had top surgery, or who do not plan to have top surgery. Some folk don't bind, some only bind on occasion, and some are most comfortable binding whenever possible. If being read as male is a priority, binding can feel very important. With the right binder, binding can be an effective and relatively comfortable way for many folk to give their chest the look they want it to have.

Purpose-made binders for folk on the FTM spectrum, and compression shirts typically designed for non-trans guys generally cost between \$30 and \$90. They can be bought from online stores such as T Kingdom and Underworks. Curalux offers Underworks fittings in BC. Some binder users pass on their used binders to online programs such as Big Brothers Binder Program, The Circle, In A Bind, and Binder Boys. These online programs are a good way to access a more affordable binder. In Vancouver, pre-owned binders are sometimes available from the Catherine White Holman Wellness Centre. If you ever have a binder that

you no longer use, you may consider passing it on to help out someone else! Another tip for reducing the cost of buying binders is to prolong its life through proper care; they should be regularly hand-washed or gently machine-washed, and air-dried. Remember to avoid bleaching or machine-drying your binder! Air drying, however, takes time and can mean that your binder is sometimes out of use. It is helpful to plan cleaning and drying around your schedule, or, if financially possible, to have more than one binder to rotate use.

Choosing a binder that is effective, comfortable, and that fits can be overwhelming. There are a lot of choices, and the trial and error method can be expensive. There are several binder review websites where you can find reviews and guidance from folk who bind around the world. While it may seem to make sense to buy a binder that is too-small or to layer multiple binders, these strategies also come with health risks. If possible, put some time and research into choosing the binder that is best for you in a comfortable size. If you are handy with tailoring clothes, it is also possible to adjust your binders to better suit the shape of your body and the look you want. The type of binder you choose, what clothes you wear with it, and the shape of your body will also all influence the best way to put it on and prevent it from rolling up. If keeping your binder invisible under your clothes is a priority, looking for one that is a similar colour to your skin tone may help. When trying on binders, use a mirror rather than looking down to check out their effectiveness; looking down at your chest will make it seem larger than it is.

Don't worry if it is a struggle to put it on the first few times! Try searching online for tips on what has worked the best for others with the type of binder you are using. When trying on a binder for the first time, you may have feelings of panic and anxiety if you get stuck. Getting past these feelings may be easier if you have someone there that you are comfortable with, even if they are only on standby in another room.

Instead of binding, some folk slouch or hunch to hide their chests. This can be effective, but in the long term can lead to posture and breathing problems. An alternative to this is to layer clothes: a tight undershirt or sports bra underneath, and successively looser items of clothing such as undershirts, t-shirts and a button-down shirt on top. This can get warm, so it is important to choose breathable fabrics such as cotton on hotter days. Layering can also help augment the effects of a binder.

Safer Binding

Although many people find that binding is uncomfortable, it should not interfere with your breathing, cause pain, or lead to abrasions. These symptoms are indicators that a binder may be too tight to be healthy. Binding should ideally be done with a fabric that allows breathing or wicks away sweat to help minimize the risk of rashes or fungal infections. If this is not possible, alternatives include binding over the top of a cotton undershirt, or applying corn starch before binding. Ensuring that you are totally dry and not straight out of the shower before putting it on is also helpful with this and will make it much easier to put your binder on.

While different options work for different people, there are risks associated with using anything other than a purpose-made binder, as well as with wearing a binder that is too small. Depending on the method, such as bandages, tape, or neoprene, these risks may include restriction of airflow, postural damage, abrasions and long-term skin damage, fungal infections, rib damage or fluid build-up in the lungs. They will also be less effective. If using a non-purpose-made binder, or a binder that may be too small, stay aware of your comfort level. If you are feeling pain, irritation, circulation problems or shortness of breath, seek an opportunity to take a break from your binder. Cutting down on smoking, if you feel able, may help in avoiding respiratory problems or triggering asthma attacks when binding.

Potential harmful effects can be seriously compounded by wearing a binder for more than 8-12 hours, and you may not be able to feel the damage that is occurring. Try to plan a break from your binder into your schedule, and identify a location where it will be possible for you to do this. Never sleep in your binder. Damage is still possible within this timeframe, so to help avoid it, try to get into a routine of stretching or doing yoga before you bind and after removing your binder; this will get your blood flowing, and get oxygen to your cells. For many folk, taking a break from binding can be stressful. It can be helpful to consider working with a trans-inclusive and trans-knowledgeable therapist or counsellor about navigating the feelings that this can bring on.

Some folk with nipple piercings who bind don't experience any problems while others experience some pain, bleeding, or snagging. If you have nipple piercings and are trying out binding for the first time with them in, you might choose to have a trusted support person (if you have one available) present to help you if you need assistance. Binding over a new piercing may lengthen its healing time.

If you are planning to have top surgery in the future, binding over the long term can affect your skin's elasticity, which in turn can affect the outcome of top surgery. Talking with a trans-knowledgeable doctor can help give you a better idea of what binding options might be best for your chest in its current and future shapes.

Pads and Breast Forms

For folks who feel that having breasts is important to them, and do not wish to or may be currently unable to have breast augmentation surgery, there are several points that are important to consider. For some, hormone treatment may cause breast development to a point that feels right for them. For others, this development may not be enough for them to feel comfortable about the shape of their chest, or to feel likely to be read as female if this is a priority for them.

Many folk on the MTF spectrum have been targeted for marketing of fraudulent miracle creams and non-legitimate herbal treatment that claim to be able to stimulate breast growth. It's not possible to prove that no cream or herbal treatment can ever have any effect, and some folk are happy with the impact of herbal regimes as part of their transition under the guidance of a practiced herbalist. However, most of those marketed so far have been ineffectual beyond moisturizing, and are sold purely to financially exploit the needs of some trans folk.

Exercises to develop the pecs can enlarge the chest and make breasts more prominent. It's important to be aware, however, that undertaking this form of exercise may be triggering for some folk, due to previously being taught to associate pec development with masculinity.

Some folk choose breast forms, which are materials, typically worn in a mastectomy bra or purpose designed support, which give the look of breasts. Options such as seed in durable bags worn inside a mastectomy bra are a lower cost alternative chosen by some. Others may prefer the look and feel of silicone gel forms. There are many different options available in terms of material, size, colour and ways for forms to be worn. Generally forms and pads do not come with nipples, however, attachable nipples are optionally available for many. A fitter for pads or forms may be able to advise you on what sizes and materials might work best for you, and how to choose bras and clothing to wear with them. Some folk feel that very large breast pads may make them less likely to be read as female, while others disagree or feel that a larger chest is important for how they feel about the way they look.

Remember to avoid contact between any jewellery and the pads or forms you are using. When wearing pins or brooches, it's a good idea to fix them to your clothing before putting them on; this way you will be sure to avoid puncturing the pad or form. Also be aware of everyday activities that may put forms at risk of being punctured. Sweat can also damage pads and forms, so it is important to wash them after wear. Use warm water and a very mild soap, ideally free of perfumes and moisturisers. It's also useful to avoid getting them into contact with any perfumed body products you may use, such as deodorant or perfume. Other methods to preserve the condition of forms may include keeping them in their original packaging if it is designed to help them keep their shape, and putting them on over a soft surface, or while sitting, to minimize damage if they are dropped.

To lessen the damaging effects of sweat on pads or forms that may come from wearing them on a warm day, wear a thin layer of absorbent material behind them to help soak up perspiration. Alternatively, wearing forms or pads inside a mastectomy bra can help reduce discomfort and moisture build-up. You can sleep in forms, but bear in mind that doing so will add to their wear and tear.

Some forms are available which attach to your body, and can be particularly useful for giving you more options about what to wear and what physical activities you can undertake. There is an added cost factor with these, however, as their supports will regularly need to be replaced. When the supports are removed, they can leave red marks and adhesive residue and you may want to plan around this.

Some folk choose to inject silicone directly into their breast tissue, as well as into other parts of their body. This practice carries extremely high health risks, and is not recommended. If you have injected silicone in the past, it is recommended that you talk to a doctor immediately. If you do decide to inject silicone, regardless of the health risks, some tips for safer injection include:

- Use a new needle each time you inject, and don't share needles.
- Swab your injection site with alcohol before injecting, and cover it with a band-aid afterwards to help keep it clean.
- A needle exchange program may be able to keep you in supply of clean needles, and help you dispose of old ones safely. One venue to exchange needles is the Bute Street Clinic, located at **QMUNITY**. If there is no needle exchange program near you, your local clinic or community centre may have safe needle disposal bins available.

Hair Removal

Permanently removing chest hair is important for some folk. Long term feminizing hormone treatments can reduce body hair, and make it easier to manage through strategies such as body hair removal cream; however this involves some waiting, and only applies to folk taking feminizing hormones. Some short term solutions include shaving, epilating, and waxing, all of which can create the problem of stubble.

If you can afford it, try getting a few professional waxes before trying waxing at home; this will help you to wax with more comfort and effectiveness. Electrolysis and laser hair removal treatments are more effective in the long term, but are more expensive. Whatever method you choose, moisturizing immediately after hair removal, and exfoliating one or two days afterwards, can help keep your skin smooth, as well as help prevent ingrown hairs.

Bras

A bra that fits well can help define and shape your chest, as well as provide comfort and support. However, getting a bra that fits can be a challenge! Bra sizes are not consistent; they vary between brands, and even within different styles by the same brand. Bra shopping can be stressful for a variety of reasons. This section is intended to help you through the bra selection process.

It can be useful to have an idea of your bra size, particularly if you are shopping for bras online. If possible, it is helpful to get a bra fitting done by a trans-inclusive salesperson. When you find a good store or salesperson, consider letting others in your community know about them! The following guide may also help give you an idea of your size, however, keep in mind that sizes vary. Even if you have been measured by a professional, trying on a bra before you buy it, if there is the option for doing so in a situation that is comfortable for you, is the best way to make sure you are getting a fit that's right for you.

Most bras have two measures: band and cup. The band size is an even number, such as 34, 36, 38, etc, and is based on the measurement around your chest just below the breasts. Cup size refers to the volume of the breast that fits into the cup of the bra. Cup size is also proportionate to band size, so larger bands have a larger cup size. For example, a 34C bra has the same cup volume as a 36B.

To determine your band size, start by measuring your ribcage right

where the bra band would fit, below the breasts. Exhale before measuring, keep your arms down, and pull the measuring tape as snugly as you can. If your measurement is under 38, you may need to add a few inches to it to discover your bra size, as indicated in the chart. If the measurement is 38 or higher, take the number as your band size, rounding fractions and odd numbers up to the closest higher even number.

To find your cup size, measure loosely around the fullest part of your bust. Subtract your band size from this measurement. The difference in inches determines your cup size.

Band size chart		Cup size chart	
Chest measurement	Band size	Difference in inches	Cup size
27"	30	0	AA
28"	32	1"	A
29"	32	2"	B
30"	32	3"	C
31"	34	4"	D
32"	34	5"	DD
33"	34	6"	DDD(F)
34"	36	7"	G
35"	36	8"	H
36"	36	9"	I
37"	38		

Bra Shopping

Bras can be purchased at specialty lingerie stores, department stores, general retail clothing stores, second hand or thrift stores, and online. Online stores, department stores, and higher-end specialty lingerie stores are more likely to have a better variety of sizes and styles, particularly larger sizes. Chain lingerie stores have less size and style selection, but often have more affordable bras.

Online stores allow you to browse at your leisure, and often have a chat function that will let you ask questions. However, you will not be able to try on items. Specialty lingerie stores often have attentive service, which can either be a plus or minus depending on if you want assistance or privacy. Department stores and thrift stores may have less sales people on the floor, and may be less likely to have gendered change rooms.

Bra prices can range from less than \$20 at second hand stores, to well over \$100 for designer brands. A more expensive bra will often be better made and last longer, but bras are made out of delicate material and none will last forever.

Bras should be hand-washed in cold water if possible, and laid flat or hung out to dry. To keep bras wearable for as long as possible, never put them in the dryer. The heat from a dryer will weaken the elastic material, changing the bra's shape and fit, and can also increase the chance of an underwire coming out through the fabric on the side.

Types of Bras

Underwire bras have a wire support that curves along the underside of the breast. A properly fitting underwire bra will give support and shape, but a poorly fitting underwire bra may pinch or dig in.

Sports bras are designed to minimize bounce and movement during exercise, often by compressing and flattening the chest. Sports bras are sometimes used in place of a binder for those wishing to create a flatter chest shape.

- Minimizer bras compress the chest and can reduce bra size by a cup or two, but will not create a flat silhouette.
- T-shirt bras are smooth, seamless bras designed to create an invisible silhouette underneath t-shirts and other thinner tops. They are often lightly padded.
- Padded bras give extra shape and volume to the breasts.
- Push-up bras are designed to press breasts together and upwards to maximize cleavage, and are often padded as well.
- Full cup bras give coverage and support to the entire breast, and may be preferred by people with larger breasts for maximum support
- Half or demi-cup bras are cut lower, and may be better suited for those with smaller breasts. The half-cup bra gives less support but allows for lower necklines to be worn.

Bra Accessories

Cookies or chicken cutlets are some of the names given to different types of bra padding. Chicken cutlets refers to silicone inserts shaped like their namesake, while cookies are padded, oval shaped fabric inserts that often fit into a pre-made pocket inside the bra. These sorts of padding devices are usually placed inside the bra along the bottom of the bra, toward the armpit.

Bra extenders are straps that attach to the back band of a bra, to make

it larger. Bra extenders can be very useful if you have a larger band size and have difficulty finding bras in your size, particularly for people who require smaller cup sizes but larger band sizes.

Hormones

Hormones are chemicals in our bodies that influence the function of our cells. Sex hormones influence development of our pre-birth sex organs, and our secondary sex characteristics, such as breasts, body hair, and more. For some trans folk, hormone therapy is an important aspect of transitioning.

Deciding for or against hormone therapy can be a big decision. People may reach that decision through reflection, as well as dialogue with people close to them, such as counsellors, doctors, or therapists whom they trust. For others, once they have all the information, it feels like an easy choice to make. Many people are faced with challenges such as service providers with a gatekeeper mentality, or health or financial barriers that may delay their ability to access hormone therapy; this can be very stressful.

The way each body reacts to hormone therapy is different, meaning that hormone therapy needs to be evaluated over time. Additionally, while some effects such as breast growth may be permanent, others require sustained hormone therapy. When the changes to your body resulting from hormone therapy have been completed, your medical service provider can help you work out the lowest possible dose to maintain these changes while also minimizing your risk of negative health effects.

Accessing hormone therapy through a medical service provider may not lead to immediate access to hormones. This necessitates an assessment process that can be stressful or triggering for some. However, non-prescription hormones or herbal replacements may be ineffective or less effective than prescription hormone therapy, and may put you at risk of serious health problems. Choosing a trans-competent service provider, if possible, can help make the experience of being prescribed hormones by a medical professional go smoothly, be less stressful and more informative.

Some trans folk access hormones without a prescription. This is often due to reasons such as not being able to find a medical service provider who will prescribe them or with whom they feel comfortable, or preferring to avoid medical service providers after a negative experience. There are risks to obtaining hormones without a prescribed

plan; there are possibilities of things such as excess testosterone being converted by the body to estrogen, difficulty obtaining the right treatment for you or getting it consistently, and lack of medical after-care to monitor any side-effects of hormone therapy. It is highly recommended to access a trans-competent medical service provider. In BC these may be found through organizations such as **QMUNITY**, The Catherine White Holman Wellness Centre, or the Transgender Health Information Program, or through word of mouth in the trans community. If you decide to access hormones without a prescription, doing as much research on hormone therapy for trans folk as possible, and seeking tips and guidance from trans folk in your community may help to partially reduce risk.

If you inject hormones, some tips for safer injection include:

- Use a new needle each time you inject, and don't share needles.
- A needle exchange program may be able to keep you in supply of clean needles, and help you dispose of old ones safely. One venue to exchange needles is the Bute Street Clinic, located at **QMUNITY**. If there is no needle exchange program near you, your local clinic or community centre may have safe needle disposal bins available.
- Swab your injection site with alcohol before injecting, and cover it with a band-aid afterwards to help keep it clean.

For hormone injection, you may need muscular gauge needles, which is a different size from most needles used to inject drugs. The Catherine White Holman Wellness Centre offers free hormone injecting equipment, and education about safe hormone injecting techniques.

Hormones for Folk on the MTF Spectrum

For folk on the MTF scale, hormone therapy might include one or more of the following; estrogen, anti-androgens (testosterone blockers), and, less often due to known side-effects and uncertain effectiveness, progestagens. This combination is typically decided with the goal of minimizing health risks, and maximising desired effects. In the chest area, feminizing hormone therapy can help stimulate breast and nipple growth, soften skin, decrease muscle mass, and slow the growth of body hair, making it less noticeable and easier to remove. Most of these effects take place over a period of up to five years although sometimes in stops and starts, and with shorter or longer timeframes for some folk. Some folk decide to wait for their breasts to complete their full growth

as a result of hormone therapy before having any breast augmentation, as this can have an impact on the final look of their breasts. Some folk on the MTF spectrum who have testes removed report having their breasts go through some growth afterward.

The side effects of feminizing hormone therapy can, among others, include increased risk of pancreatitis, cholesterol level changes, increased risk of type 2 diabetes, and elevated blood pressure. Follow up with a trans-competent doctor is recommended to help manage these side effects. Breast development and estrogen may also affect your risk of breast cancer; check out the cancer screening and prevention section of this resource for more information.

Hormones for Folk on the FTM Spectrum

Testosterone is the hormone therapy most commonly used for folk on the FTM spectrum. Effects of testosterone on the chest area can include thicker, coarser and faster growing chest hair, as well as increased upper body strength and muscle mass. Effects may differ for different people as, for example, genetics may play a role in changes to hair growth. While hormones may decrease fat and increase muscle, they do not generally affect breast tissue after puberty, and some folk who want a flatter chest opt for chest surgery or binding. It is important to work with your medical service provider to determine the right dose of testosterone for you on an ongoing basis, as different people's bodies react differently to hormone therapies. Even if the effect of hormone therapy is slow, it is important not to take more testosterone than prescribed or combine your treatment with others such as non-prescription steroids without medical consultation. Your body may respond to excess testosterone by turning it into estrogen, and the altered dose may increase the risk of negative health effects.

Most of the effects of testosterone take place over a period of up to five years although possibly in stops and starts, and with shorter or longer time frames for some folk. Some changes are permanent whether or not someone continues hormone therapy, while others are reversible, and others require sustained, although possibly reduced, hormone treatments to maintain effects and/or manage side-effects. Testosterone's side effects can include changes to weight, fat distribution around internal organs, blood pressure, cholesterol balances, and red blood cell and hemoglobin levels. This may put folk who have hormone therapy at greater risk of heart disease. This may be a reason

to consider working to adjust how diet, exercise, stress management and cigarette smoking factor into your life, and also looking into what tests are done as part of your regular medical check-ups. Excess testosterone converted by the body to estrogen may increase risk of cancer, and it is important to take this into account when considering cancer screening and self-examinations. Working with a trans-competent doctor in determining the right dosage for you, and on follow-up care, can help to minimize these risks.

Working with a therapist or counsellor as well as other medical service providers can help you decide if, and when, hormone therapy might be the right choice for you. Some things to address include your hopes, expectations and concerns about what hormone therapy might mean for you, your body, your life, and the people close to you, as well as how to prepare for the possibility of things turning out differently than you had expected. Additionally, medical service providers can help work out what program of hormones will work best for you, make adjustments to your hormone therapy in response to effects that hormones may be having on your emotional and mental well-being, and work to decrease the impact of hormones on your risk of health problems such as cancer and cardiovascular disease.

In British Columbia, a trans-competent General Practitioner will be able to prescribe hormones. If you do not have a relationship with a doctor where you feel comfortable discussing this, organizations such as the Transgender Health Information Program may be able to help connect you with other options. Service providers are legally and ethically bound to assess whether hormones are an appropriate form of treatment for you, if you have all the information about the possible outcomes of hormone therapy, if hormone therapy will negatively affect any conditions you may have, if you know how to self-administer the medication, and if it will be possible to evaluate whether hormones are working for you after beginning the therapy. Some kinds of heart disease may affect your ability to receive hormone therapy safely, which is one of many reasons to work towards heart health in terms of diet, stress management, and exercise. Reducing or quitting smoking can also help greatly with heart health; however it is important to acknowledge that for many smokers this is particularly difficult to do during stressful times, which may include preparation for assessment.

This assessment can feel invasive or like gate-keeping, but is something your provider is obliged to do before giving you a prescription to ensure that hormone therapy will not affect you adversely, and that you are

aware of potential side-effects. This process also helps ensure that you have all the available information to make your decision. To reduce feelings of stress, anger or frustration that the assessment may give you, you can do further research about the assessment process, and be prepared with what you want to communicate to the person assessing you. You can also seek emotional support and utilize relaxation techniques before and after the assessment to help minimize negative emotions.

If you feel that your doctor is not sufficiently trans-competent to make the assessment, you may ask for a referral or seek other health professionals who you feel will be able to make better informed decisions. One option, if you think you might want to pursue surgery in the future, may be that of an MSP-approved psychologist or psychiatrist, who may also assist with subsequent MSP surgery assessment.

Some foods and types of exercise are believed to boost different hormones. There is a lot of information available online on this topic; unfortunately it is sometimes conflicting. If you have access to a trans-competent nutritionist or doctor, they may be able to help you tailor a nutrition plan to help boost the kinds of hormones that you want. See the referrals page at the back of this resource for the Catherine White Holman Wellness Centre, where at the time of printing a trans-competent nutritionist was accessible.

Surgery

Some trans folk feel it is important for them to have surgery to change the look of their chest. Whether or not to have chest surgery is a big decision for many folk, and one arrived at in different ways. Some people know immediately and definitely if it is right for them and when the right time for them to have it may be; others decide after reflection for a long period of time, whether that be solitary or through lengthy dialogue with partners, friends, support groups, or trans-competent counsellors or therapists. Trans-competent medical professionals can help you assess the potential health impacts of chest surgery.

Surgery can help people feel great about themselves, and help make their bodies feel more reflective of their gender identities. They can also require long term maintenance, and can be very expensive. It is also important to recognise that deciding whether or not to have chest surgery does not affect anyone's right to self-define their own gender. In addition to this, many trans people feel that social pressure to be

read as their gender, or to have chest surgery, is a way to uphold the gender binary. If you work in sex work, you may feel additional pressure from clients to have chest surgery. As most chest surgery is not totally reversible, if you do decide that it is an important part of your current work life, you might also want to consider what your feelings may be if your work were not a factor.

Surgery for Folk on the MTF Spectrum

Breast augmentation may involve salt water or silicone implants surgically inserted via incisions under the breast, near the nipple, or in the armpit. This can be an isolated process or coupled with bottom surgery. It may be also done by lipofilling- using fat from the person's own body, although this is a less common procedure. If you are considering breast augmentation and are unsure of what size breasts will feel right for you, you could try filling water balloons to different measurements and inserting them into a bra. Try on a top over the bra to get a better idea of how this will look, and spend some time examining your body in a mirror from various angles. When you find a look that feels right for you, measure the water and tell your doctor. Your doctor may have additional strategies that you might want to try.

During surgery, fluids for implants are inserted within a solid casing that keeps them confined. Some folk who face barriers to breast augmentation have tried injecting silicone into their breasts without this casing or without the help of a licensed supervisor; this is known to be highly dangerous and potentially fatal. If you have injected silicone in the past, you should seek medical attention as soon as possible.

A number of factors, including the materials the implant is made from, your age, and your body shape may affect the look and feel of augmented breasts, which may differ from non-implanted breasts. Working with a doctor who you trust and who is knowledgeable and experienced in working with trans folk can help you get the look and shape that you feel works best for your body. It is also important to be aware that as breast implants can break down and rupture over time, check-ups at a schedule advised by your doctor are important. These check-ups are important, as implants may need to be removed and possibly replaced in the future. Removed implants can leave noticeably stretched skin when not replaced.

Many folk who also undergo hormone therapy tend to wait until the resulting development from this is complete before undergoing surgery,

as this can have an impact on the end appearance of the breasts. However, hormone therapy is not necessary for you to be able to have breast augmentation.

Surgery for Folk on the FTM Spectrum

For folk who want a flatter chest, binding may temporarily change the look of the chest, and hormones can reduce fat, but only chest contouring surgery can remove breast tissue. There are two main kinds of chest surgery that folk on the FTM spectrum might choose to have one of; chest reconstruction and breast reduction. Breast reduction surgery reduces the size of breasts, without necessarily giving you a flat chest. There are many reasons for choosing this option; however it is important to note that this may limit your option for choosing chest reconstruction later, so it should not be seen as a step towards it.

Chest reconstruction removes most breast tissue and excess skin as well as skin folds where the breasts were. It alters the shape of the pectoralis muscles, and adjusts the nipple area size and/or location. What method of chest construction is chosen, what ratio of nipple repositioning, resizing and maintenance of sensation you and the doctor decide to work towards is decided based on your feelings, the shape and size of your chest, and the elasticity of your skin.

For some people, multiple surgeries are needed to get the look that they want for their chest. It is important to bear in mind that different body shapes will have different looking chests after surgery. For this reason it can be helpful to think about, and talk with your doctor or therapist before surgery about what your hopes and expectations for surgery are. You could discuss what your plan might be if the result differs from those expectations. Exercise, especially focussing on strengthening the pectoral muscles both before and after surgery can help give a more muscular look to the chest. It is important, however, to wait to exercise after surgery until you have the go-ahead from your surgeon.

Chest reconstruction or contouring can be undergone before, after, or without hormone therapy.

Before Surgery

In addition to suggestions and requirements of your doctor, some ways you can get your body primed for chest surgeries include:

- Working to get your health and fitness to their optimum. This is a

challenge for anyone, and at a time when you may be under stress, and facing large medical expenses, you might face additional barriers to this goal.

- Exercise, state of mind, and getting the nutrition you need from a balanced diet will all help your body to be more resilient to the physical stress of surgery. It will also help you face the emotional demands of this time. Check out the related sections in this resource for more information.
- Quitting or cutting down on cigarettes and other smokables 2-12 weeks before surgery can help your body to heal faster and reduce the risk involved in going under anaesthesia. Quitting or cutting down are not easy tasks, especially at a time that may be stressful, and the support of people close to you, support groups, or quitting help-lines can be helpful in achieving this goal. Smoking has been shown to only create a short term relief of stress from nicotine cravings. To reduce stress in the long-term, quitting smoking may actually be of greater benefit.
- Check with your doctor about any medications you may be taking. It is important to know if they could be negatively affecting your body's healing, and if so look at alternatives.

Organizing things in advance for your time after surgery can help reduce physical and mental stress while you need to be focusing on healing and on the day of surgery. This may include:

- Letting your support network know what they can do to help. Many people in your life may want to assist, but not know how. Are there people close to you who can bring you meals or groceries; drive you to and from surgery; be with you around the clock or in shifts for the first few days after the operation; help you with showers, drying and dressing; help care for pets or children?
- Having comfortable, button-front tops ready that are easy to get in and out of
- Putting something that you can throw up into in the car you will be travelling home in, and at home, in case of nausea
- Preparing water to sip on the way home
- Preparing ice at home to put on swelling or bruises
- Stocking up on non-perishable foods for times when you don't feel able to go to the store

Acupuncture can help to strengthen the body before surgery and heal after surgery. In addition, it can also help to minimize pain, improve

relaxation and sleep; help with lifestyle changes (such as dietary changes or quitting smoking); boost immunity; reduce stress; and assist with overall mental and emotional well-being. At the time of printing, trans inclusive acupuncture was available through Gender Puncture.

After Surgery

It is normal to experience discomfort after surgery, and some scarring which your doctor can work towards minimizing. This scarring will lessen over time. To help minimise discomfort and speed recovery, your doctor will instruct you on preparations for before and after surgery. This will include what to expect in terms of appearance and levels of discomfort of your chest as it heals, pain medication options, signs of infection or other complications, any special items you should wear such as a post-surgical bra (if you have had breast augmentation), chest compression vest (if you have had a reduction, mastectomy, or other chest contouring procedure) and chest massages to aid healing.

In addition to these, some measures to promote healing after surgery include:

- Drinking lots of water
- Moving around and getting fresh air, to whatever extent is comfortable for you as soon as you can, to help prevent blood clots. For 3-4 weeks, however, avoid activity that may raise your heartbeat, and especially activities that involve upper arm strength such as lifting, pushing, or pulling
- Being aware of signs of infection or other complication, such as increased redness or heat around the incision, or experiencing a fever. If you notice any possible signs of infection, discuss them with your doctor as soon as possible
- Working to cut down or quit cigarettes, alcohol, caffeine and sugar intake. This can be stressful to consider, and it may help to begin cutting down 6-12 weeks before surgery. It may assist you to achieve this goal to consider it as a temporary sacrifice to assist your surgery, just until you have fully healed
- Listen to your body's signals, and to the extent that you are able, eat when you are hungry, and rest when you are tired or experiencing increasing discomfort. The down-time will ultimately have you back into the swing of things faster
- Relaxation techniques such as visualization, or individually relaxing

body parts, can help you through discomfort, and your body's recovery powers will benefit from your positive frame of mind

- Some natural treatments such as lavender oil and rose-hip oil are believed to help minimize scarring
- Massaging scars can help to soften and minimize them. Be sure to consult with a doctor regarding at what stage of your healing this will be of benefit at, and what is the best technique for massaging your scars

Emotional Wellbeing

Many factors affect our moods and feelings, and anti-trans oppression can place unique stresses on trans folk. Our state of mind has an impact on our overall health, our self-esteem, and our motivation to make healthy choices for ourselves. Here are a few suggestions to keep yourself elevated:

- Exercise doesn't have to be painful, boring or exhausting! Whether you enjoy lifting weights, walking along the beach, dancing, yoga, stretches, or something else entirely, making an exercise that you enjoy into a regular, frequent part of your week will provide your body with natural feel-good chemicals, and boost your long-term health and energy levels.
- What do you love doing? Whether it is reading, meeting new people, learning, playing a sport, singing, connecting with a good friend, or just taking a long, relaxing bath, people often find that they don't have enough time to do the things that make them feel really good. Sometimes they can even feel guilty or unproductive for allowing themselves time to do the things that make them less stressed! Try to find ways to fit some you-time into each week. If you are responsible for children or elders and need to take a break from that, try setting up a care-share with other parents or caregivers, or looking into services that provide sliding scale or free care assistance. We can care for others better when we have cared for ourselves.
- Working to change the world around you can be a big benefit to your well-being and to our communities. This looks different for everyone, and may include activism, advocacy, supporting loved ones, volunteering, organizing events and groups, or educating others.

For many, connecting with other trans folk to talk about their experiences and share support is vital. Some possible ways of doing this includes contacting organizations such as **QMUNITY** or the Transgender

Health Information Program for information on local trans social and support groups and events, taking part in online trans forums, reading the work of trans writers and bloggers, and volunteering with trans groups and services.

Nutrition can play a big role in your state of mind, as well as on your physical health. Check out the nutrition section of this resource for more information!

If work, study, or any other part of your life keeps you stationary for long periods of time, factor some gentle stretches into your routine wherever possible. You will notice the impact on your stress and energy levels! As you stretch, breathe deeply, to increase oxygen to your brain and release endorphins into your body

If you take medications, sometimes staying on top of your regimen can feel very therapeutic. If you take daily medications, for example, try taking them at the same time every day for a week and take note of how you feel versus when you take them at different times through the day and/or miss doses

Massage therapy can be an excellent de-stressor. At time of printing, the Catherine White Holman Wellness Centre offers free massage appointments to trans folk

For many people, spirituality is an important part of life. For trans folk of faith, connecting with a faith organization and/or online faith community that is trans-inclusive can be integral to well-being

Cancer Prevention and Screening

Cancer is the second-highest cause of death in Canada, and affects many of us and those we love throughout our lives. Not all the causes of different types of cancer are known, but some of the factors believed to contribute to risks for chest cancers such as lung cancer and breast cancer include:

- Stress, social isolation, oppression, and lower access to high quality foods
- Excessive alcohol and drug use
- Cigarettes, and other kinds of smoking
- Poor diet
- Older age
- Hormone therapy in some circumstances

- Family medical history

While sufficient data has not yet been gathered on trans folk's incidence of cancer, trans folk experience high levels of oppression in Canada, which may increase the chances of being affected by some of the above risk factors. These factors may be compounded by other experiences of oppression. Additionally, trans folk are often not represented in cancer-related health information, and can face many barriers to accessing trans-competent health care. Hormone

People tend to be overly optimistic about big health issues that can be frightening; about the chances that they will affect us, and the chances that they can be easily treated. Optimism is great, but can be dangerous if it leads to complacency about screening for cancer, which is the best way to prevent the worst outcomes. When detected and treated in time, many people diagnosed with cancer live long lives.

For many trans folk, different factors may make them reluctant to get their chests screened. These can include negative or ambivalent feelings about a part of the body that requires screening, a lack of available trans-inclusive information and services, or past negative experiences with health services providers. Sometimes trans folk are also reluctant to self-examine, or to get early warning signs of cancer, such as lumps, checked out. Establishing an ongoing patient relationship with a trans-competent doctor who you are comfortable identifying as trans to can help give you an immediate resource if potential early cancer signs present, and can ensure that you are offered screenings at appropriate intervals for the types of cancer that you may be at risk for. Regular screenings and immediate response to possible symptoms, especially after age 50, give you the best possible chance of surviving cancer.

Some cancers, such as lung cancer, are screened for and affect people of all genders in a similar way. For some trans folk, the term 'breast' cancer may be triggering or feel irrelevant to their bodies. However, while breast cancer is most likely to affect cisgender women, it affects people of all genders. Seeing a trans competent doctor who you are comfortable with gives you the best opportunity to be offered the screenings that are right for you.

Mammograms are recommended for people over the age of 40 who have breasts.

The rates of breast cancer among folk taking estrogen or progestin are unknown, but these therapies are believed to increased risk.

Breast implants are not believed to affect chances of breast cancer, but may make it harder to detect lumps through self-examination. This could mean your doctor would need to refer you to a specific screening facility. A trans-competent doctor may be able to help you ascertain that services they refer you to are also trans-competent.

Folk on the FTM spectrum who have top surgery likely have a reduced risk of breast cancer. Consultation with a trans-competent doctor about screening is still recommended, as some breast tissue will remain and some folk have reported cases of cancer after top surgery. Periodic chest wall and lymph node exams after the age of 50 are recommended for folk in this category, although recommendations may vary for those with other risk factors such as a family medical history of breast cancer.

Taking testosterone at a dosage appropriate for the individual does not affect the risk of breast cancer. The body can, however, respond to excess testosterone by converting it to estrogen, which can increase the risk of breast cancer.

For some trans folk, chest self-examination can be stressful or triggering; more regular screening with a trusted doctor instead, or working with a therapist or counsellor towards making chest self-examinations less stressful may be helpful. A significant other may also be able to help as an alternative to self-examination.

Cancer screening for other body parts such as the cervix or prostate can also be very difficult for some folk to consider; working up to this with a trusted doctor can be helpful if one is available, and trans-geared events such as “Papapoolooza” may be a more comfortable environment for these tests.

Self-examination cannot replace screening done by a medical professional, but getting into a routine of checking your chest monthly so that you are familiar enough with it to notice changes can make a big difference to early detection. As well as self-examinations and regular screenings, you can help reduce your own risk of chest cancers through nutrition, moderation in alcohol and drug consumption, getting your favourite kinds of exercise regularly if you are able to, and working to cut down or quit smoking. Many people face barriers to these strategies, and seeking support from friends and family or a counsellor, therapist, or support line, and planning in advance how to build them into your life can be helpful.

While nutrition cannot take the place of regular screening, some foods

that have been found to be helpful in cancer prevention include:

- Cruciferous vegetables / brassicas including broccoli, brussels sprouts, turnips, bok choy, arugula, horse radish, radishes, wasabi and watercress
- Smaller cold water fish, salmon, sardines, mackerel, anchovies, and herring
- Many berries contain antioxidants and phytochemicals that can inhibit cancer growth. It has been suggested that darker berries are more anti-cancer nutrient rich
- Green tea contains polyphenols which have been found to bind to a protein found on tumour cells, slowing its growth. Remember to steep your tea for a while in order for the nutrients to have a chance to come out!
- Olives and extra virgin olive oil have been found to be helpful in cancer treatment because of their high content of healthy fat which is especially important in cases of breast cancer. Coconut oil contains CLA (Conjugated linoleic acid) which has been found to be effective in cancer prevention

Cardiovascular Health

Many people feel social pressure to look fit, which can not only manifest as fat-phobia, but eclipse the more important goals of exercise, nutrition, and a body weight that doesn't put strain on the heart. With heart disease being one of the biggest causes of death in Canada, it is important to factor heart health into our everyday lives.

As with cancer, there is insufficient research on trans people's experiences of heart health. Some factors including the effects of oppression can increase trans folk's chances of being exposed to factors linked to heart disease, such as smoking, stress, and poverty, among others. Some folks on long term hormone therapy who may have increased risk of cardiovascular disease include:

- Those over the age of 50 with additional risk factors who are taking estrogen. Those also taking progestin may have further increased risk
- Folks taking testosterone who have additional risk factors, such as smoking

Some ways that you can help reduce your risk of heart disease include:

- Regular heart health check-ups with a trans-competent doctor
- Getting 30+ minutes of exercise every day or as much as you're able, such as brisk walking, biking, vigorous housework, dancing, or anything that you enjoy that gets your circulation going
- Increasing fibre in your diet, and making sure that fats, sodium, alcohol and caffeine are only consumed in moderation
- If you have high levels of cholesterol, you may wish to focus on increasing your intake of whole foods, which can contain plant sterols that help to reduce levels of bad cholesterol. Some juices, yogurts, and margarines are available that are fortified with plant sterols; however it is believed that plant sterols found in whole foods are the most effective method, and may be more affordable than fortified foods. It is important to note that some concerns have been raised about potential side-effects of plant sterols. When using food as medicine, talking with a doctor or nutritionist first can help you maximise potential benefits, and avoid health risks. See the nutrition section in this guide for more information
- A lower salt diet can help to lower blood pressure
- Working to cut down on cigarettes and alcohol. Cigarettes and alcohol can be highly addictive, and many people use them to help cope with stress, although cigarettes have been shown to not actually decrease stress. Support from people close to you, or a support group, counsellor or helpline, can be helpful with these goals
- Working to decrease your stress levels. For more information on this, check out the emotional well-being section of this resource
- If you are using hormones, discuss with your doctor the best way to limit the effects of hormone therapy on your heart health, adhere to the amount of hormones prescribed, and have periodic check-ups and blood tests to monitor blood pressure and screen for high cholesterol and diabetes which can increase the risk of cardiovascular disease

Nutrition

Our bodies function at their highest capacity when nourished properly. The best way to do this is with a diet rich in natural, fresh foods that create less metabolic waste, have a lower Glycemic Index, and help us to feel clearer and more energetic.

It can be less convenient to prepare a quality meal than to grab something pre-made on the go. Unfortunately, convenience foods often have their nutrients lost during processing. There are many delicious recipes, snacks, juices and smoothies that take little time to prepare, are often cheaper than pre-made foods, and which your body will thank you for!

While some folk prefer to eat organic, organic foods can be more expensive, and many trans folk live on limited incomes. The most important thing is to enjoy a plentiful variety of fresh fruit and vegetables, and if eating organic foods is a priority, enjoy them when you can afford it. Also remember that grocery shopping when you're not hungry can make a big difference in what you choose to put in your cart!

You might have noticed that you crave different kinds of foods depending on the season. This is nature guiding you to take in a wide variety of nutrients, and avoid allergies (and boredom!) from repetitive eating. Culture can also play a role in shaping our nutrition. Traditional First Nations diets, for example, consist of foods that can be gathered from the surrounding environments, and have traditionally played important roles in the culture and health of First Nations folk. Try searching online for 'recipe' and the name of a locally and seasonal food that you've never tried before.

You don't need to "clean your plate" nor do you need to eat a specific amount of any one food or another for good health. Eating a variety of foods, choosing foods for both pleasure and nutrition, and stopping when you're full are all great, healthy practices.

Many people have been socialized to think of some foods as being gendered, e.g. high protein foods as masculine, or leafy greens as feminine. If there are any foods you prefer to avoid for this reason, it is important to make sure that you are not missing out on important nutrients, which may help in transitioning as well as general health, as a result. For example, if you prefer to avoid red meat, choose other foods that are alternative sources of protein and iron.

For those who have surgery, including plenty of dietary protein, nutrients and fibre is a key to faster healing. Garlic is believed by some to be helpful at this time, with anti-biotic, anti-inflammatory, anti-fungal, and immune system boosting properties. While foods such as garlic may help the healing process, they cannot replace prescribed medications such as antibiotics. One example of a way to add more garlic to your diet may be adding a minced or crushed clove to soup as it boils.

Fibre is also very important at a time when anaesthetics and painkillers may be interfering with the digestive system. Foods with live bacteria cultures can also be a great help to the digestive system, and may also help prevent colon cancer! Such foods as yoghurt, kefir, sauerkraut or kimchi are delicious ways to consume live cultures. The period immediately following surgery can see people lose their appetites at a time when their body needs a lot of nutrients; if this is an issue, try smoothies that contain fruit, dairy, and possibly protein supplements.

You could also replace or partially replace stimulating substances like coffee and simple sugars with fresh fruits and vegetables or juices. This will give you a boost of easily absorbed nutrients, without the sugar-crash. Consciously making this a habit can help break the addictive power of junk food, and leave your body feeling more energetic and awake. For a caffeine hit that's gentler on your body and has many nutritional benefits including anti-cancer properties, try switching from coffee to green tea.

It's also important to introduce more complex carbohydrates like whole grains, and root vegetables into your diet. These provide your body with energy over a longer period of time, and help you avoid that sugar crash! Great energy-boosting foods include sunflower seeds, salmon, sardines, oats, bananas and pineapples.

Food means many things to people, above and beyond the nutrients in it. Food can bring back memories, good or bad. Sharing food with loved ones can be a joyful experience. Delicious food can be a joy in its own right. Nutrition is important, but it is great to also enjoy food as a bigger part of your life!

Supplements are no replacement for a balanced diet, but they can help you when it's difficult to get everything that your body needs on a daily basis. It might be worth investigating if some of the following are right for you:

EFA (Essential Fatty Acids) blends: these are fats that the body cannot produce on its own; they improve the health of the nervous system (potentially reducing stress), brain function, and skin, boost immunity, and help to balance hormones. Did you know that your brain is 60% fat? That means that the fats we eat actually become our brain tissue. To build polyunsaturated oils that contain the EFA Omega 3's into your diet, try to increase the amount of smaller types of fish and include a variety of nuts and seeds, nut and seed butters, flax seed oil, or fortified foods like eggs.

Vitamin B Complex: Vitamin B is necessary for energy production, your nervous system, healthy digestion, and healthy skin. Foods containing Vitamin B 12 include eggs, milk, cheese and poultry.

Vitamin D: The absence of this can leave you feeling down during those long rainy months! Vitamin D is important for the nervous system and absorption of calcium. Check out the Vit. D content in any EFA blend you may be taking, because the recommended daily allowance is often met in these.

Iron: If you do not eat much meat, taking iron through supplements, or nuts such as cashews or almonds can help to avoid anaemia. Anaemia negatively affects energy and emotional well-being. Folks on testosterone may want to take iron with caution, though, as it can act as a pro-oxidant, and increase risk for heart disease.

Calcium: Calcium aids our bones, and helps prevent osteoporosis. If you do not consume much dairy, you can boost your calcium with foods such as fish with the bones (like canned sardines or salmon), fortified soy milk, tofu, nuts and seeds, broccoli, kale, or supplements.

There are supplements, herbs and foods available specifically for folk on the female to male and male to female spectra. These can play a role in hormone balancing, pain management, surgery recovery, and stress relief. Be sure to research and consult a trans competent health care provider or nutritionist before taking anything, or adopting a particular diet. Herbs can be very powerful, especially when combined with other medications. See the reference section of this resource for information about the Catherine White Holman Wellness Centre, where at the time of printing a trans competent nutritionist is accessible.

Remember, nutrition is not a replacement for exercise. The best way to stabilize your blood sugar and look after your body is with a combination of nutrition and exercise that works for you.

For more information, referrals and support on health and wellbeing for trans folk in BC, we suggest:

QMUNITY, BC's Queer Resource Centre — the hub for lesbian, gay, bi, trans and queer community programs, training, and advocacy. Its team of skilled professionals reaches 35,000 people annually to deliver programs that enhance the wellbeing of queer people; provide education, training, and resources on queer issues; and to advocate for queer people through increased visibility, individual support, information, and referrals. www.qmunity.ca 604 684 5307

The Transgender Health Information Program

Health care information and system navigation support for trans folk and medical service providers

www.vch.ca/transhealth 604 633 4241

Prism Services

Clinical, education, information and referral service for LGBTQ2S communities. www.vch.ca/prism

Catherine White Holman Wellness Centre

A variety of low barrier and free wellness services for trans and gender diverse folk.

www.cwhwc.com 604 442 4352

Trans Alliance Society

Transgender support, education, outreach and advocacy. www.transalliancesociety.org

Saige Community Food Bank

A safer space for transgender and gender non-conforming or queer individuals to access healthy food.

www.saigecommunityfoodbank.com

PFLAG Canada

Support, education and resources on issues of sexual orientation and gender identity for parents and friends of LGBT folk.

www.pflagcanada.ca

Brazen: Trans Women Safer Sex Guide

www.catie.ca/en/resources/brazen-trans-women-safer-sex-guide

Primed: The Backpocket Guide for Trans Men and The Men Who Dig Us

www.queertransmen.org



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