

BHEKISISA TRACKING EMBED CODE

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Headline: [WATCH] How do puberty blockers work? 4 questions answered

Blurb: People with gender dysphoria are more anxious and depressed than those who don't have this body discomfort. But that changes once people start gender-affirming treatment. Find out more here.

Bullets:

- Puberty blockers can be a life-saver for teenagers who experience gender dysphoria, which is an intense body discomfort that can affect people's mental wellbeing.
- The blockers pause the onset of adult traits associated with males and females (such as beards and breasts) to give a questioning teenager the time to consider whether they want to continue with a gender transition.
- A survey of 20 000 transgender people in the United States found that people who had access to puberty blockers were less likely to have suicidal thoughts as adults.

Bhekisisa Team

1. What are puberty blockers?

Puberty blockers [stop the body from producing sex hormones](#) such as testosterone (a male hormone) or oestrogen (a female hormone).

Physical adult traits (say, breasts or a deep voice and facial hair) start to develop during puberty.

Puberty blockers means the person taking them won't develop the physical characteristics associated with adult women or men for the period during which they take the medicine.

2. Are puberty blockers reversible?

[Yes.](#)

These medicines simply pause puberty for a short while.

The jury is still out though on whether these medicines affect whether people can build strong bones.

Most adult bone mass is [gained during adolescence](#).

Some studies show that people who took puberty blockers had [lower than expected](#) bone mass after they started hormone treatment.

Other [research has found puberty blockers don't really affect](#) how strong your bones are.

3. Why do people use puberty blockers?

Puberty blockers can be a life-saver for children who experience gender dysphoria.

Gender dysphoria is a [feeling of body discomfort](#) that can be so intense that someone's mental wellbeing is affected.

It's a feeling that many transgender people experience because they don't identify with the gender they were given at birth.

Puberty blockers buy time for teens with gender dysphoria to be certain that they want a gender change.

The blockers, [for instance, give them time](#) to explore the social, emotional and legal challenges that come with a gender change.

If the teen decides to go through with the gender change the physical change will also be easier because they won't have developed the traits associated with the gender they feel uncomfortable with.

[Experts say](#) teens using puberty blockers should keep on consulting with their healthcare team before they make a final decision on whether they'll take cross-sex hormones (testosterone or oestrogen).

[Studies](#) show most teenagers who say they're uncomfortable with the sex they were given at birth [stick to their decision](#) to change their gender.

4. How do puberty blockers save lives?

People with gender dysphoria are [more anxious and depressed](#) than those who don't have this body discomfort.

But once transgender people have started gender-affirming treatment, their rates of depression and anxiety [drop](#) to similar levels as people who don't have gender dysphoria.

[A survey of 20 000 transgender people](#) in the United States showed that adults who got puberty blockers as teens were less likely to have suicidal thoughts as grown-ups.

This story was produced by the Bhekisisa Centre for Health Journalism. Sign up for the newsletter.