

FENWAY  HEALTH

All About Hair:

A Guide on Hair Growth,
Loss, and Removal



All About Hair: A Guide on Hair Growth, Loss, and Removal

We know that hair can be a sticky wicket and/or a source of joy in a trans or gender diverse person's life. This guide covers hair loss across gender identities, removal of hair for gender affirmation, and removal of hair as it pertains to affirming surgeries.

Image credit: The Gender Spectrum Collection

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This guide is broken down into three main sections

Section 1: Hair Loss at the Crown of the Head and Hairline

Section 2: Not Enough Growth and Thickening of Body and Facial Hair

Section 3: Hair Removal

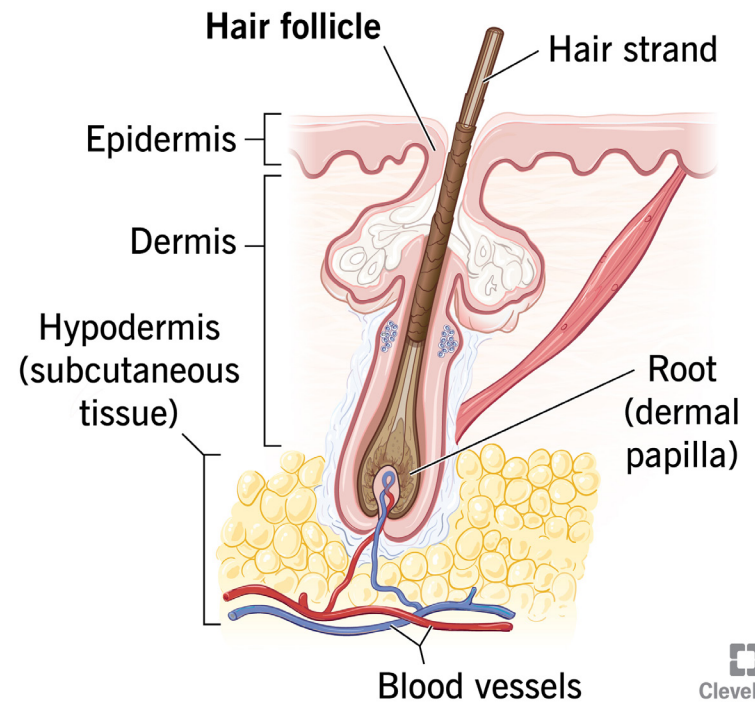
Definitions

Endogenous hormones: the hormones your body produces naturally

Alopecia: the partial or complete absence of hair from areas of the body

Hair follicle: A hair follicle is a tube-like structure (pore) that surrounds the root and strand of a hair. The follicle produces a strand of hair.

Hair Follicle




Cleveland
Clinic
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Image credit: Cleveland Clinic

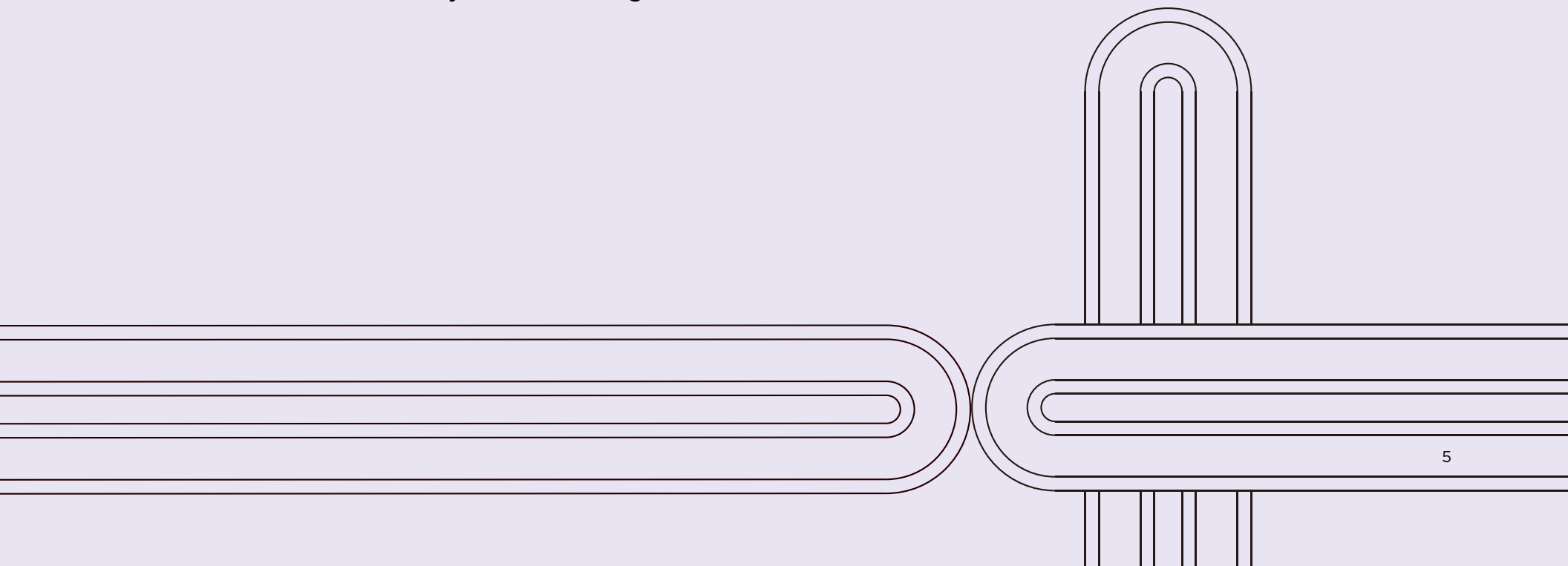
<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/body/23435-hair-follicle>

General effects of estrogen hormone therapy on hair

Non-permanent effects of estrogen as hormone therapy are that facial and body hair can get softer, lighter, and grow more slowly, but hair will not go away from estrogen alone. Hair loss at the temples and crown/top of the head (androgenic alopecia) may slow down or stop, but hair will typically not regrow.

General effects of testosterone hormone therapy on hair

Permanent effects of testosterone hormone therapy are growth, thickening, and darkening of hair on the body; growth of facial hair, including beard and mustache; possible hair loss at the temples and crown/top of the head (androgenic alopecia) with the possibility of complete baldness. This may resemble and be affected by the hair patterns of cisgender men in your family; however, some do note that this form of hair loss is seen more commonly in those taking testosterone.

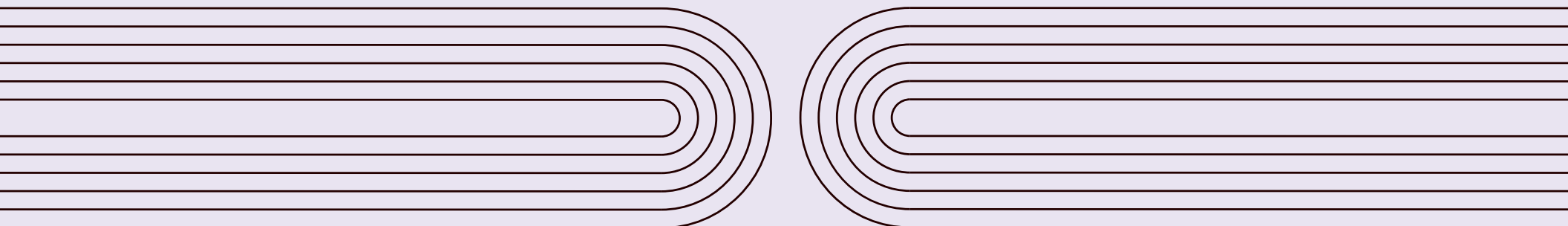


Section 1: Hair Loss at the Crown of the Head and Hairline

Hair loss at the crown of the head and along the hairline, also called male-patterned baldness or androgenic alopecia, may happen because of your endogenous hormones (the hormones your body produces naturally) or gender affirming testosterone. This kind of hair loss is related to genetics and is inherited from family members.

Why it happens

For people whose endogenous sex hormones are predominantly testosterone or are on gender affirming testosterone, hair loss at the crown of the head and along the hairline happens because an enzyme called 5-alpha reductase converts testosterone to dihydrotestosterone (DHT). DHT binds to receptors on the hair follicles and shrinks the follicle, leading to balding.



Treatment Options

Treatment options are available to prevent this type of hair loss from occurring, to stop it from progressing, and to help with hair growth after hair loss.

Oral Medications

5 alpha-reductase inhibitors: *Finasteride, Dutasteride*

These medications are taken daily to suppress the enzyme that converts testosterone to DHT.

Minoxidil

Minoxidil stimulates hair growth by allowing more oxygen, blood, and nutrients to hair follicles. It may take several months to notice the effect of minoxidil. Ask your provider about the risks and benefits of oral minoxidil as a medication option.

Hair Transplantation

Hair transplants involve plastic surgeons removing individual hair follicles from parts of the scalp with hair and placing them in the areas where balding has occurred. Hair transplants can be costly and take several months for the new hairs to grow.

Topical Medications

Minoxidil

This medication is applied to the scalp and can be prescribed by a healthcare provider or purchased over the counter at many pharmacies. Minoxidil stimulates hair growth by allowing more oxygen, blood, and nutrients to hair follicles. It may take several months to notice the effect of minoxidil.

Ketoconazole

While this is not a first line option for treating hair loss, a few studies support using ketoconazole shampoo to stimulate hair growth.

Laser Therapy

Low-level light therapy has been shown to improve hair loss by stimulating cellular activity in the tissues on the scalp.

Treatment Options

The following *DIY options* are not necessarily supported by research but may be a more accessible option to try and can be especially effective when combined with medication options.

Microneedling

Microneedling uses several thin needles to make tiny holes in the top layer of your skin. This process stimulates stem cells in the scalp and induces activation of growth factors.

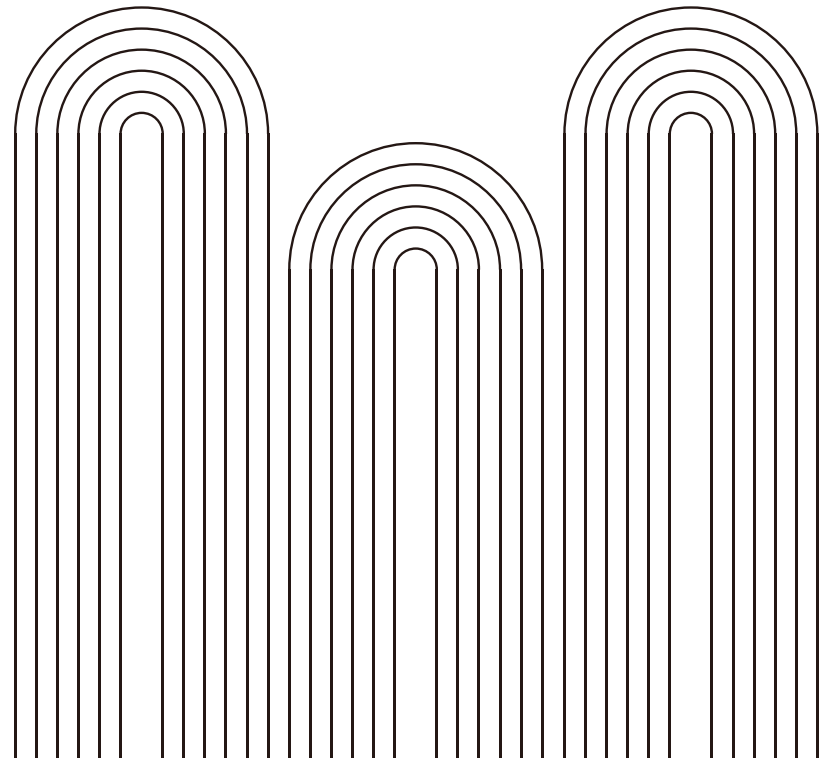
Microneedling may be done by a dermatologist or at home with a microneedling or derma roller kit. Derma roller kits can be found at many pharmacies.

Supplements

Vitamins and minerals play an important role in hair follicle development and supplements that contribute to hair follicle development may help promote hair growth. Healthy, well-balanced diets contribute to hair health and overall micronutrient levels in the body. Vitamin D, vitamin C, iron, zinc, riboflavin (B2), selenium, folic acid, vitamin B12, vitamin E, and biotin (B7) are important to hair health, but research does not support that adding these supplements to your diet will increase hair growth.

Wigs and Hair Systems

Wigs and hair systems can provide an affirming, non-medical aesthetic for many people. They can be purchased at wig and hair system stores or salons. Hair systems are synthetic or real human hair attached to a base material which is then attached to someone's head using a skin safe adhesive.



Section 2: Promoting Growth or Thickening of Body and Facial Hair

Why it happens

Every person has different baseline levels of endogenous hormones, and our bodies all respond differently to hormone therapy. This causes variation in characteristics like facial and body hair growth that can be affirming. You may want more hair growth for affirmation, that's where the treatment options below may help.



Treatment Options

Medication

If you are taking testosterone, you can discuss your testosterone levels and your dosage of testosterone with your healthcare provider. If your levels are on the lower side, increasing the dose of testosterone you are taking may thicken hair on your face, neck, and body (armpits, legs, arms, groin).

Minoxidil is a topical medication which you apply to the skin in the areas where you want hair to grow. There is also an oral formulation that is taken daily. This medication has been tested and shown effective for hair growth at the crown of the head, beard, and eyebrows. Minoxidil stimulates hair growth by allowing more oxygen, blood, and nutrients to hair follicles. It may take several months to notice the effect of minoxidil. Ask your provider about oral minoxidil as a medication option.

Topical minoxidil can be prescribed by a primary care provider or dermatologist and purchased over the counter at many pharmacies.

Laser therapy

Low-level laser therapy has been supported as a new, safe device-based modality for stimulating hair growth in people with androgenic alopecia. Laser therapy is a non-invasive, safe, and potentially effective treatment option.



Image credit: The Gender Spectrum Collection

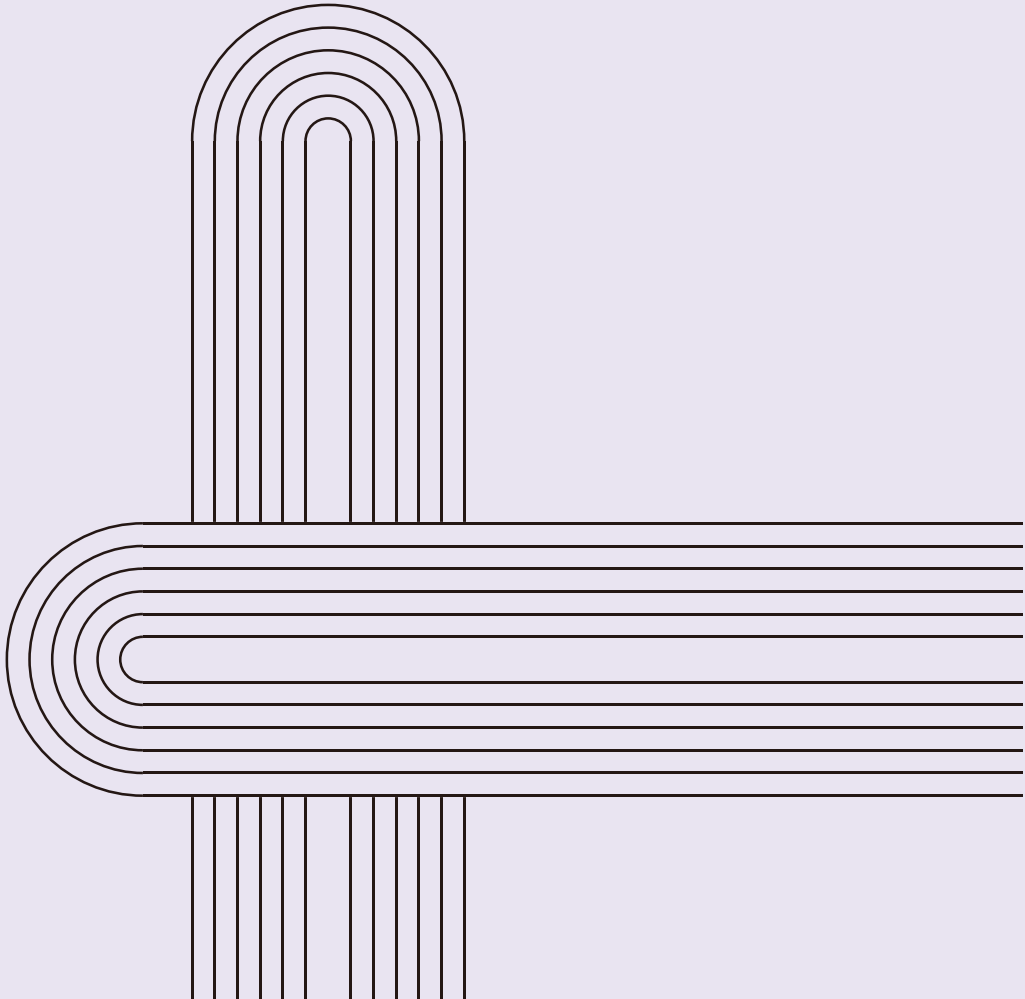
Treatment Options

Beard and mustache transplants

Transplants are done to correct facial areas with hair density deficit and for cosmetic enhancement of pre-existing facial hair. The surgical technique includes the harvesting of grafts from the scalp by the follicular unit and then placing them in either premade slits or by stick and place method. To access hair transplantation for beard and mustache search for plastic surgery practices or departments near you. Searching “Where to get a beard transplant in [your local area]” in an online search engine will yield a handful of results. Insurance will likely not cover the cost of hair transplantation for beard and mustaches and the procedure can be costly.

Supplements

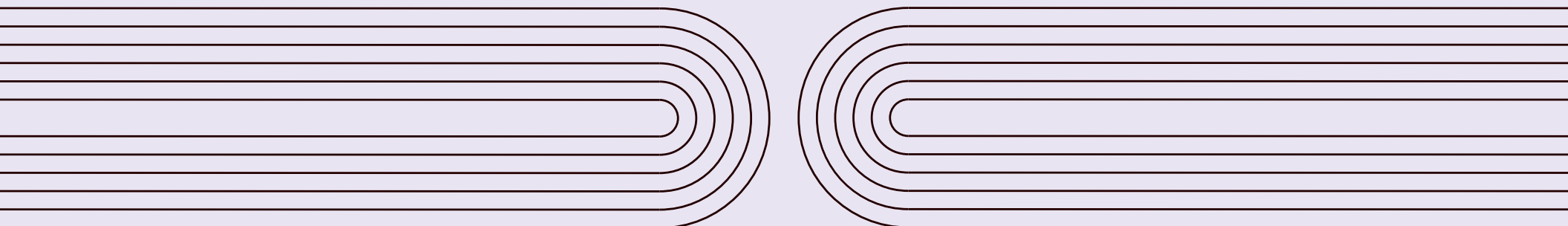
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Section 3: Hair Removal

Hair removal for gender affirmation can include all areas of the body: face, neck, body, and genitals.

You will find different types of hair removal on the next page as well as considerations for hair removal including what to expect with hormones, treatment options, and insurance.



Types of Hair Removal

Laser

During laser hair removal, a laser emits light that is absorbed by the pigment (melanin) in the hair. Laser is most effective when hair is significantly darker than someone's skin tone. The light energy is converted to heat, which damages the hair follicle. This damage inhibits or delays future hair growth. Multiple laser hair removal treatments are needed for initial hair removal, and maintenance treatments may be needed as well. Skin tone and hair color may affect the ability to have laser hair removal.

Note: Finding a laser hair removal provider that uses a YAG laser is important to avoid depigmentation of darker skin.

Electrolysis

A trained electrologist inserts a thin wire into the hair follicle under the surface of the skin. A low-level electric current moves down the wire to the bottom of the follicle, destroying the hair root. Hair is unable to grow back in an area where the follicle has been destroyed. Electrolysis is the only recognized form of permanent hair removal. The process for electrolysis can be uncomfortable and require multiple sessions depending on the location and density of follicles.



Image credit: The Gender Spectrum Collection

Contact the Fenway Health Trans Health Team at transhealth@fenwayhealth.org for a list of hair removal providers in the greater Boston area.

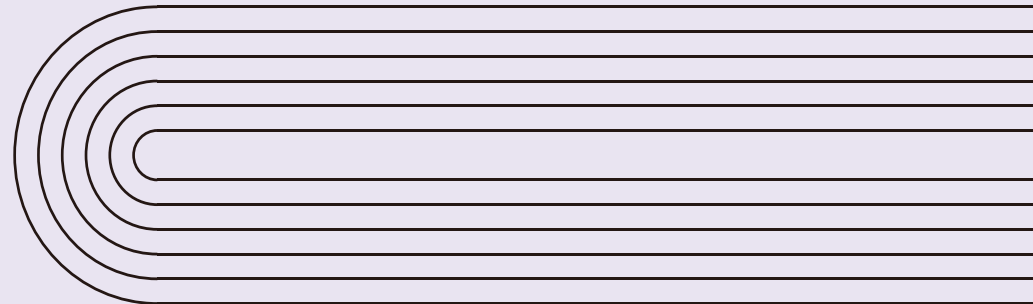
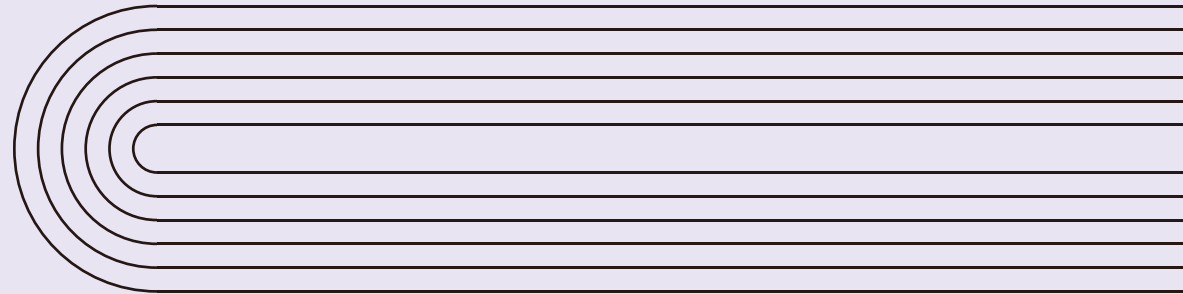
Types of Hair Removal

Consider these DIY options as a first step to hair removal affirmation. DIY options should not be used in preparation for gender affirming bottom surgery. Consult your dermatologist about the best DIY option for you, especially if you are taking medications for acne.

Other forms of hair removal include DIY options

- ◆ Shaving
- ◆ Waxing
- ◆ Sugaring
- ◆ Tweezing
- ◆ At home laser hair removal devices
- ◆ Trimming

Note: Consider skipping hair removal sessions or routines if you have open sores, rashes, bruises, swelling, sunburns, or cold sores.





Hair Removal on the Face, Neck, or Body

Insurance Considerations

Some insurance plans cover hair removal for the face, neck, or body, but many insurance companies and plans do not cover hair removal except if related to gender affirming bottom surgery. You can find out what your insurance policy covers by looking into the Medical Necessity Guidelines for Gender Affirming Care for your insurance plan. This can be found online through your member services portal or by calling the member services number on the back of your card.

If your insurance does cover hair removal of the face, neck, or body, they may require a referral and letter from your medical provider and/or therapist to show that you meet the criteria outlined by your insurance.

Note: Insurance coverage for electrolysis remains challenging due to legal and administrative barriers that electrologists face in billing. Insurance coverage is easier to get for laser treatment.

You may have to pay **out of pocket** for hair removal and submit claims for reimbursement from your insurance company after. You should let your hair removal provider know ahead of time if you would like a super bill.

Reach out to the Fenway Health Trans Health Team at transhealth@fenwayhealth.org for a list of hair removal providers with or without insurance in the greater Boston area.

Hair Removal for Bottom Surgery

Individuals who are undergoing penile inversion vaginoplasty may be required to have permanent hair removal on their penis and scrotum as this tissue will be used to line the vaginal canal. Hair that isn't removed prior to surgery can cause problems in the future. Consult your surgeon about the need for hair removal for other genital procedures, and for additional resources and information about your individual needs. On rare occasions post-operation neovagina hair removal may be necessary. Talk to your surgeon and electrologist about the risk of post-op neovagina hair removal if you are concerned.

Permanent hair removal is done using electrolysis and/or laser hair removal and can take a year or more before you will be ready for surgery. If you can afford hair removal, starting this process may decrease the time you wait to access surgery. Reach out to transhealth@fenwayhealth.org for a list of hair removal providers in the Boston area.

Note: DIY options should not be used in preparation for gender affirming bottom surgery. Hair removal for phalloplasty and metoidioplasty may not be necessary. Consult your surgeon for additional information.

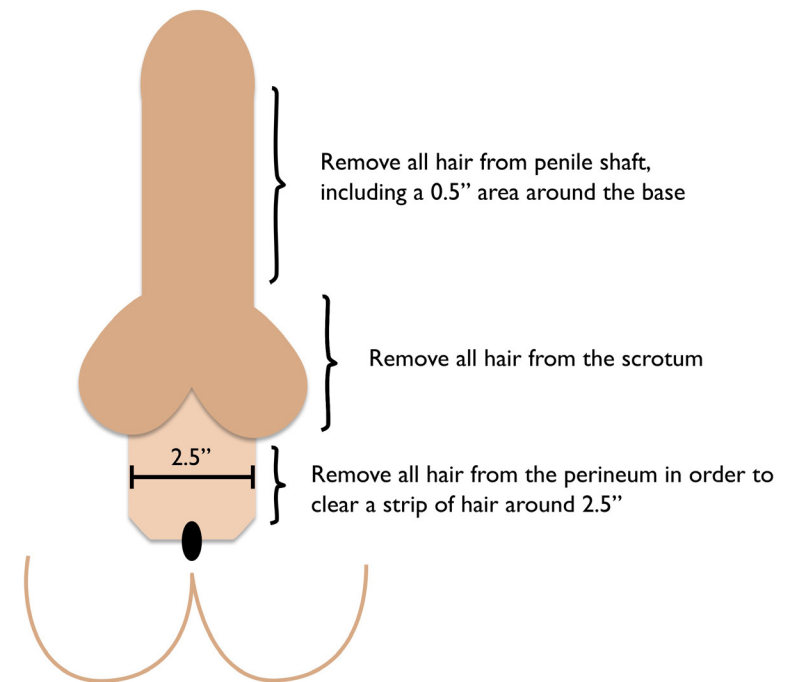


Image credit: Boston Medical Center GenderCare Center

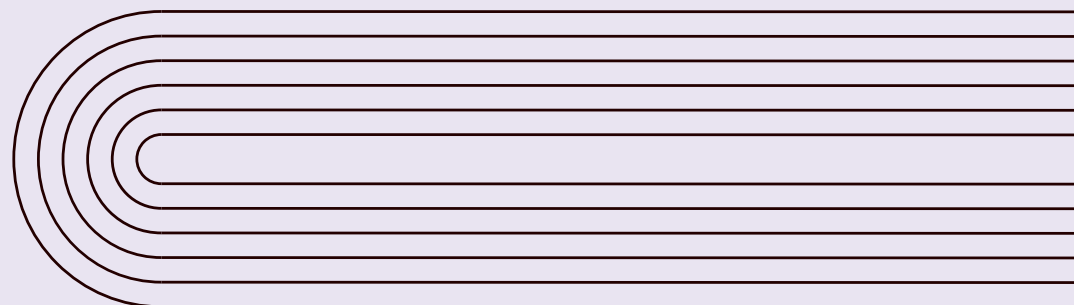
Insurance coverage for hair removal for bottom surgery

Your insurance company may require documentation of prior insurance approval for bottom surgery to also be able to get coverage for hair removal related to vaginoplasty. You should talk to your surgeon's office about obtaining authorization for surgery and hair removal.

Low-cost hair removal and financial aid options without insurance

Local electrolysis schools are a wonderful option to access hair removal at a lower cost. Microgrants that can help cover the cost of hair removal or other expenses related to gender affirmation include:

- ◆ Electrolysis Support Fund
- ◆ Trans Empowerment Project
- ◆ Jim Collins Foundation
- ◆ Trans United with Family and Friends
- ◆ TransMission
- ◆ American Trans Resource Hub
- ◆ GenderBands



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