

## Hormone Replacement Therapy for Transgender Singers

### **Terms -**

**cisgender** – those who identify with the gender assigned at birth

**cis male** – males assigned male at birth

**cis female** – females assigned female at birth

**HRT** – Hormone Replacement Therapy

**MTF** – Male to Female

**FTM** – Female to Male

Transgender person/man or woman is correct

Transgenderers/transgendered is incorrect

**Estrogen** – If Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) is started after the individual's initial puberty it won't have an effect on the depth in pitch and resonance of the voice. However, one can train their vocal chords to produce a sound more feminine in nature; especially with the help of speech therapy and a voice teacher. Also unaffected is the prominence of the thyroid cartilage or Adam's apple.

**Testosterone** - One of the most desired effects of testosterone by transgender men is a deepening of the voice. However, there are uncertainties to voice changes: testosterone doesn't always drop the pitch low enough, and the changed voice can be persistently hoarse, weak, crack, have a smaller range or two separate voices and even difficulty in matching pitch, especially for the first 3-6 months. This can cause both personal and professional difficulties, but for singers, the unpredictable and irreversible nature of testosterone's effects on the voice can be a terrifying prospect. However, the loss of singing ability is not inevitable, and there are strategies for easing the transition of the FTM singing voice.

### **How Testosterone Affects the Larynx**

The larynx, or voice box, is a hormone-dependent organ. In teenage boys, increased testosterone production causes the vocal folds (vocal chords) to thicken, lengthen and mature. The cartilage of the larynx grows, further influencing the tone of voice. It also tilts slightly, resulting in a bump on the throat—the Adam's apple. This is a process that happens over time (up to 3 years) as the teen matures.

Transgender men conversely are often started on the highest recommended dose of testosterone, bringing about changes that would normally occur over several years in a much shorter time. Testosterone therapy makes the vocal folds grow thicker but they are restricted in length by the size of the larynx, which is typically smaller in transgender men than in cisgender men. Cartilage growth typically happens during puberty, and early cartilage ossification caused by testosterone further limits the growth of the transgender male larynx. The prominence of the Adam's apple after taking Testosterone therapy can differ from person to person.

## **Caiden's experiences -**

Caiden started hormone replacement therapy in May of 2015. Some of his typical side effects included the body producing more oils, which brought about more perspiration, body odor changes, and acne. Although he struggled with depression before and after HRT, he initially experienced an increase in depression, due in part to the difficulty in releasing and processing new emotions. This has now become more balanced.

After 3 months, Caiden lost his higher tessitura and experienced cracking in a similar fashion to what a boy goes through with puberty. Although the higher range decreased, the lower range did not automatically begin to develop until the cracking had lessened at about 6 months. After that point, his lower range became more attainable and consistent. It also took about 6 months for his chest size to reduce and for his Adam's apple to grow a bit more prominent.