

FENWAY  HEALTH

BINDING

A resource guide on how to bind safely,
where to find affirming products, and
answers to frequently asked questions

Created by Fenway Health's Trans Health Program, 2025

Overview

This guide is broken down into sections

Section 1: The Basics of Binding

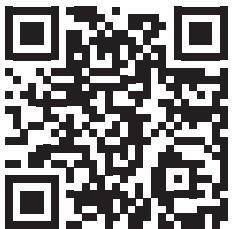
Section 2: Safe Binding

Section 3: Binders & Dysphoria

Section 4: Where to Get Binders & Tape

Section 5: Binding Resources

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fenwayhealth.org/thresources

The Basics of Binding

Binding

Chest binding, also known as binding, is a technique used to create the appearance of a flatter chest. Binding can be a helpful way to reduce chest dysphoria and feel more comfortable with your body. There are many ways people bind their chests, some of which are safer, more comfortable, and/or more effective than others. The most common way for people to bind is wearing a binder.

Binders

A binder is a tight undergarment used to create the appearance of a flatter chest. They often look like a tank top or undershirt that can be tucked into your pants, described as a “full-length binder”, or end towards the bottom of the ribs, “half-length binder”. Binders are designed to be pulled over the head, stepped into, or may have zippers, clasps, Velcro, or hooks that can be closed once the binder is in place. There are tons of excellent companies that manufacture chest binders for people of all ages and sizes, and different styles, brands, and designs work better for different people.

Choosing a Binder

Binders come in a variety of materials and styles, so it is important to figure out what works best for you. Binders can be uncomfortable to put on and take off, and it may take some getting used to. Some binders have zippers or Velcro to make this process easier. Putting on and taking off a binder can be particularly challenging for folks with larger chests and getting one with a zipper or Velcro can be helpful.

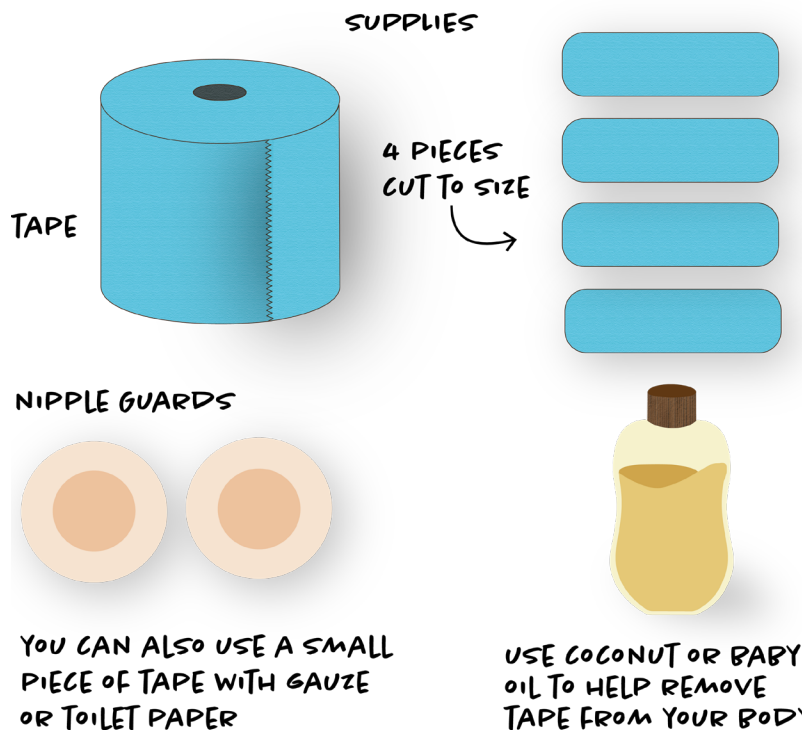
Many binder companies have size guides that talk about what to expect while wearing and fitting a binder. These companies also typically have helpful and affirming customer support for any questions you may have about how to buy or wear a binder. If you have other questions about how to find a binder that might work best for you, feel free to talk to your medical provider about these options.

The Basics of Binding

Binding Tape

Another common binding device is using kinetic tapes (KT) designed to compress or stabilize a part of the body, such as KT Tape or TransTape. This is medical-grade tape that is intended for use on the skin. The most common side effect from taping is skin irritation, so this is not recommended for folks with particularly sensitive or irritable skin. Do not use duct tape or any other tape not intended for use on skin, as they are more likely to cause more significant damage to your body or can make it much more difficult to breathe. Kinetic tapes can be found at many grocery stores and pharmacies and can be a particularly accessible option.

Applying and Removing Tape



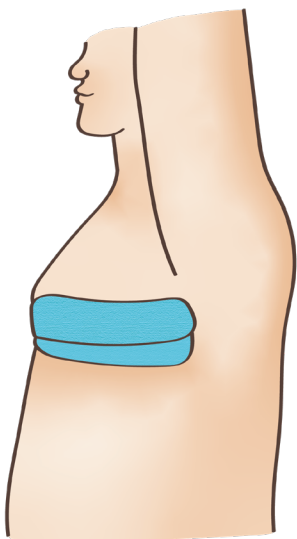
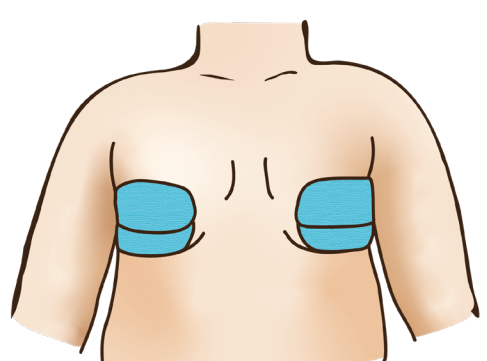
TAPE

SUPPLIES

4 PIECES CUT TO SIZE

NIPPLE GUARDS

USE COCONUT OR BABY OIL TO HELP REMOVE TAPE FROM YOUR BODY



THE NUMBER OF PIECES OF TAPE YOU USE, THE LENGTH OF THOSE PIECES, AND THE PLACEMENT OF YOUR TAPE ON YOUR BODY WILL VARY FROM PERSON TO PERSON

YOU CAN ALSO USE A SMALL PIECE OF TAPE WITH GAUZE OR TOILET PAPER

IT MAY TAKE A FEW TRIES TO FIGURE OUT WHAT WORKS FOR YOU

The Basics of Binding

Additional ways for a flatter chest

Besides binders and binding tape, layering shirts can be helpful. Start with a tight-fitting shirt or sports bra as a bottom layer and add successive layers over it with each layer looser than the one underneath. Shirts with patterns as the top layer can help hide the appearance of a chest. Some people also find unbuttoned or unzipped shirts or jackets to be helpful in creating the appearance of a flatter chest. Keep in mind that layering shirts can be warm and uncomfortable, and it is important to drink lots of water and stay hydrated.

Tight fitting sports bras work well for some folks, while others layer two sports bras to achieve the feeling and appearance of a flatter chest. Use caution if layering sports bras, as the elastic underwire/band can unevenly compress or cut into your skin and put you at risk of injury.

How flat should it be?

Binders help make your chest look and feel flatter, but some people find that no matter how they bind, their chest is not as flat as they would like. Binding works well for some folks but not so well for others, and it is important to figure out what works for you.

It can feel extra frustrating and stressful when you find that binding does not make your chest as flat as you want it to be. For some people, this tends to be a good time to think about other ways to make your chest appear flatter. For instance, try layering shirts over your binder or try wearing a patterned, unbuttoned, or unzipped shirt or jacket over your binder. At this time, it is not recommended to layer more than one binder. There is no research on the health effects and safety of layering binders, but it is likely to cause increased pain.

It is also important to remember that all bodies are different, and not all cisgender men have flat chests. Sometimes it is helpful to shift perspective. For some people, eventually moving towards top surgery is the best option. This is a personal decision, and everyone's path is different. It is okay to bind before and leading up to surgery but be sure to let your surgeon know if you bind. Binding isn't a requirement for surgery, and you don't have to do it if it doesn't work well for you.

Safe Binding

Binding is generally safe for most people when done correctly, but there are still some risks. It is important that binding is done carefully and responsibly. You should talk to your doctor if you have any chronic conditions that could be affected by binding, including but not limited to asthma, scoliosis, lupus, or fibromyalgia.

Safe Binding Tips

- ✎ You should always be able to take a deep breath without pain or difficulty while binding. You should remove your binder immediately if you have difficulty breathing.
- ✎ Your arms should have their full range of motion while binding.
- ✎ Never use an ace bandage, plastic wrap, or tape that is not intended to be used on skin. These materials are not meant for binding and may be harmful to your body or skin.
- ✎ Follow the recommended size guides provided by binder companies. Each company is a little different, so make sure that you read them carefully.
- ✎ Do not wear a binder that is too small for you. Wearing a smaller size may result in significant injury and will not necessarily make your chest flatter.
- ✎ Give your body a break every 8-12 hours when possible, and do not sleep in your binder.
- ✎ Be sure to stretch your arms, shoulders, chest, and back immediately after removing your binder. It is also a good idea to take a few deep breaths and cough to clear out any fluid build-up in your lungs.
- ✎ Wash your binder regularly and follow the cleaning and care instructions provided by the manufacturer.
- ✎ Pay attention to your body. The most common side effects of binding are back pain, soreness, chest pain, difficulty breathing, numbness, tingling, overheating, dehydration, skin rash, and irritation. If you have any of these side effects, talk to your medical provider about what you can do to make sure you are staying safe.

Safe Binding

What can I do if I have pain from binding?

The best thing you can do to alleviate pain and soreness from binding is to give your body breaks for as long as you are able to. For some folks this means not wearing a binder for a few days. For other folks this means only wearing a binder for as long as you are in public. Others still may only be able to take a quick break from binding while on a lunch break or in the bathroom. The important thing is to listen to your body and take a break when you can.

It is also helpful to stretch your body throughout the day as you are able to—stretch your arms up in the air, stretch your shoulders, back, and chest.

Stretching can be done anywhere! If you are experiencing any symptoms or significant pain as a result of binding, it is important to talk to your medical provider about this. Stopping binding is not the only way to reduce pain or other strain on the body. Depending on your needs, your provider may recommend a variety of potential options such as massage therapy, stretches, physical therapy, or acupuncture.

Signs that it's time to take a break

Chest pain

Overheating

Skin rash or irritation

Dehydration

Back pain

Soreness

Difficulty breathing

Numbness or tingling

Be sure to

Take your binder off before bed and do not sleep in it

Take a break from binding every 8-12 hours

Wash your binder regularly

Stretch your back, chest, and shoulders when not binding

Binders & Dysphoria



Photo: Spectrum Outfitters

Do I have to identify a certain way to bind?

You do not have to identify a certain way to bind! Many websites use binary language such as FTM (female-to-male), man/men/male, or trans guy(s), to talk about who their products are geared towards, but that does not mean that you must identify that way to wear a binder. Binding is meant for anyone and everyone who would like the feeling and appearance of a flatter chest.

Do I need to have surgery if I have chest dysphoria?

Surgery is not for everyone, and that's okay! Many folks who bind their chest have no intention of getting surgery. Some people feel affirmed by binding alone while others may need surgery to alleviate their dysphoria. The decision whether to have surgery is very personal and everyone's journey is different. Chest binding is a great place to start if you are unsure if you want to have chest surgery in the future.

Do I need to have dysphoria to wear a binder?

Dysphoria is not required to wear a binder. Binding is intended for anyone and everyone who would like the feeling and appearance of a flatter chest.

If you intend on having a gender affirming surgery covered by insurance in the future, your insurance company may require a documented diagnosis of gender dysphoria to go ahead with coverage. Talk to your medical provider or behavioral health provider if you have questions about this diagnosis.

Binders & Tape

There are many places to binders and tape—these are some of our favorites

Binders

Shapeshifters | shapeshifters.co

Origami Customs | origamicustoms.com

For Them | www.forthem.com

TomboyX | tomboyx.com

Spectrum Outfitters | spectrumoutfitters.co.uk

Underworks | underworks.com

T-Kingdom | t-kingdom.com

FLAVNT Streetwear | flavnt.com/

Tape

TransTape | transtape.life

KT Tape | kttape.com

Sold at most pharmacies and grocery stores

Tips

Always use company specific size charts—sizes will vary!

Avoid wearing something that is too small or too tight.

Binders & Tape

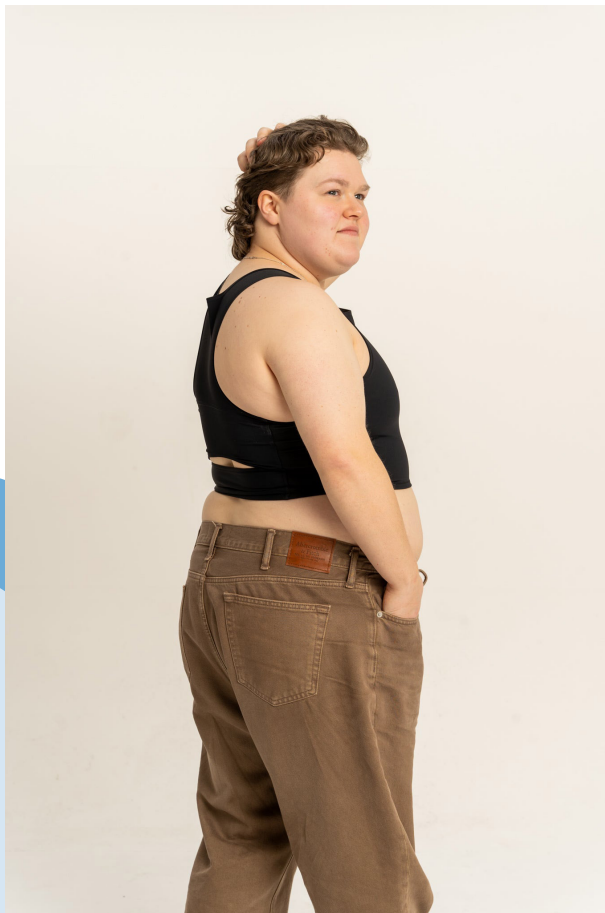


Photo: Spectrum Outfitters

If you are a Fenway Health patient, message the Trans Health Program or a member of your care team to learn more about free gear programs.

Low & No Cost Gear

GenderGear.ca
gendergear.ca

Point of Pride
pointofpride.org

Genderbands
genderbands.org

American Trans Resource Hub
atrh.org/binder-program

Tumblr Trans Clothing Exchange
transclothesexchange.tumblr.com

FtM Essentials Youth Program
ftmessentials.com/pages/ftme-free-youth-binder-program

Binding Resources

Studies on the Health Effects of Binding

Jarrett, B. A., Corbet, A. L., Gardner, I. H., Weinand, J. D., & Peitzmeier, S. M. (2018). Chest Binding and Care Seeking Among Transmasculine Adults: A Cross-Sectional Study. *Transgender health*, 3(1), 170-178.

Julian, J. M., Salvetti, B., Held, J. I., Murray, P. M., Lara-Rojas, L., & Olson-Kennedy, J. (2021). The Impact of Chest Binding in Transgender and Gender Diverse Youth and Young Adults. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 68(6), 1129-1134.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2020.09.029>

Peitzmeier, S., Gardner, I., Weinand, J., Corbet, A., & Acevedo, K. (2017). Health impact of chest binding among transgender adults: a community-engaged, cross-sectional study. *Culture, health & sexuality*, 19(1), 64-75.

Peitzmeier, S., Gardner, I., Weinand, J., Corbet, A., & Acevedo, K. (2022). Chest binding in context: stigma, fear, and lack of information drive negative outcomes, *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 24:2, 284-287, DOI: 10.1080/13691058.2021.1970814



Our Trans and Gender Diverse Resource Library has even more resources on binding, tips and tricks for applying tape, and more! Check it out at fenwayhealth.org/thresources or scan this code.



Fenway Health is a nationally recognized leader in gender affirming care. We conduct research and provide direct care, education, and advocacy. Please consider supporting Fenway's Gender Affirming Care efforts.