

So, You Want **Top Surgery.** What's Next?

A guide for choosing a surgeon, preparing for surgery, and recovery.

Congratulations!

You can prepare for accessing top surgery and feel confident by using this document for personal reflection, notes, or during your appointments. This document addresses top surgery, also known as masculinizing top surgery, to accomplish a flatter appearance of the chest.



Photo credit: The Gender Spectrum Collection

Initial Steps:

1. Choose a surgeon by doing your own research or email transhealth@fenwayhealth.org for a list of affirming providers.
2. Request a referral from your primary care provider.
3. Call the number on the back of your insurance card to check the need for required letters. Likely one from your primary care provider and one from a therapist will be needed.
4. Call the surgeon's office to schedule a consultation. Be clear about the reason: "I would like to request a consultation for chest reconstruction surgery." Confirm if letters are required prior to or after the consultation is scheduled.
5. Tell your primary care provider when your surgery is scheduled for.

My surgeon's name is: _____

My surgeon's phone # is: _____

My surgeon's fax # is: _____

My insurance phone # is: _____

My estimated out-of-pocket costs will be: _____

Check out considerations and common questions to ask your surgeon below:

Think Ahead:

- What do I want my body to look like?
- What do I want my scars to look like?
- What are my goals for now and later in life?
- How do I hope to feel after surgery?

Get to Know Your Surgeon:

- How long have you been practicing plastic surgery?
- How long have you been providing gender affirming top surgery?
- Why did you decide to provide top surgery to patients like me?
- What training do you have in providing gender affirming top surgery?
- Do you have a BMI cutoff, what is it? Why does BMI matter?

Learn About Surgery:

- What techniques do you offer and prefer?
- What are the pros and cons of each technique?
- How will my skin color be matched or affected?
- What are my options for nipple placement?
- What will my scars look like?
- How will surgery affect sensation in my chest?
- Can I see before and after photos of previous surgeries on similar body shapes and types?
- How should I prepare for surgery?
- Are there any complications?

Planning for the Future

- What are my options for chest feeding in the future?
- What screenings should I be aware of in the future?

Discussing Recovery:

- How long should I take off work or school after the surgery?
- What movement limitations and pain will I experience in recovery?
- What are drains and will I need them?
- How many follow-up appointments will take place?
- Why and how do we decide if a revision is necessary?
- Will I need someone with me while I recover?
- Will I be prescribed pain medication for recovery?
- When will I be able to see the results of surgery? What if I am not satisfied?
- Are there any aftercare regimens I should follow (*i.e., scar tape, cream/oil, sunscreen*)?
- Will I need to wear a binder after surgery? How long?
- How do I prepare for recovery in terms of comfort?

Considering Insurance and Billing:

- Will I need a referral?
- Are financing plans or discounts available if I pay out of pocket?
- What does the cost of surgery include? May I see an itemized cost estimate?
- Who is the billing contact and when should I expect out of pocket costs to be billed?
- Will I need letters from my medical and/or behavioral health provider? If so, when are they needed? Where should they be sent?



Helpful Hints

Bring a family member or friend with you to the consultation.

Bring photos of what you would like your chest to look like.

The surgeon will likely need to take photos and measurements. **Be prepared to disrobe** during the exam.

Give yourself time or space to prepare mentally and emotionally for the consultation. This may look like talking about it with others in a support group setting, participating in self-care, or rewarding yourself after the appointment!



Photo credit: The Gender Spectrum Collection

Notes:

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Preparing for Surgery and Recovery

HEALTH

- You will likely be asked to stop smoking to prepare for your surgery.
- Consult with your surgeon on which medications or stimulants should be paused (if any) leading up to the surgery.
- Fill any antibiotics or pain medications in the week leading up to top surgery.

YOUR HOME

Start to prepare your home for your recovery.

- Keep essential items close by the areas you plan to spend most of your time (*near a couch or your bed*).
- Your bathroom should have necessary items moved to lower levels so that you can reach them.
- Precook meals that are easy to reheat.

SUPPORT

- You will not be able to drive home after surgery. Arrange for someone to drive you home or reserve a ride share.
- Coordinate with friends, family, or partner(s) to support you with tasks around the home in the days following surgery. Limitations will be significant in the first few days of recovery, and help may be needed up to, or more than, 2 weeks post-surgery.
- Seek and attend peer support groups at Fenway Health, or speak to your therapist, to access support before and after surgery.
- Contact your primary care team if you are a Fenway Health patient and are experiencing unsafe housing situations.

RECOVERY

- Most folks will be able to return home the same day as their surgery and everyone will recover from surgery differently.
- Most people are prescribed pain medications to use in the days following surgery. Discomfort and pain will be most prevalent in the 3–4 days following surgery. This is normal.
- You will have a postoperative appointment about a week after surgery.
- You will have to sleep on your back for at least the first week after surgery.
- You will need to take time off work; the length depends on your job and the advice of your surgeon.
- Use over-the-counter scar treatments to expedite the healing process as well as decrease scar tissue and redness.
- Swelling and bruising will decrease in the first 2–3 weeks but may take longer for some people. This is normal as well.
- To help the healing process you will want to rest, eat healthily, refrain from smoking and drinking, and listen to your body.
- You may wish to shower the lower part of your body, but only if you can avoid getting your bandages wet. Baby wipes and sponge baths are two of the easiest ways to clean the top of your body.
- Be careful not to lift your hands above your head for at least 2 to 3 weeks after surgery. Don't lift or do strenuous exercise. Lifting anything heavier than a gallon of milk or a basket full of laundry isn't recommended early in recovery. Consult with your surgeon about when you will be able to resume light exercise like walking. After 6 or 8 weeks, you can typically resume physical exercise such as sports, lifting, and running.

Preparing for Surgery and Recovery *continued*

WHAT TO BRING TO YOUR SURGERY APPOINTMENT

Clothing:

- Zip-up sweatshirt
- Button-up shirts in large sizes (*check out thrift shops, it is better not to wear clothing that requires you to lift your arms over your head*)
- Slip-on shoes or slippers
- Sweatpants or other comfortable clothes

Personal Items:

- Lip balm
- Water bottle
- Coconut oil or another natural moisturizer
- Eye drops (*pain killers can make your eyes dry*)

Entertainment:

- Phone charger
- Headphones
- Books, magazines, coloring books

SHOPPING/WISHLIST

Pillows

- Travel neck pillow
- Pillows, to prop yourself up on like a wedge pillow or pillow with arms
- Chest pillow/mastectomy pillow

Showering & Bathroom

- Bathing wipes, body wipes
- Dry shampoo
- Shower hose and head
- Long-handled bathing sponge

Other Useful Items

- Back scratcher
- Long phone charger
- Extender arm (*aka grabber*)
- Ice packs (*if advised by your surgeon*)
- Bending straws (*silicone or stainless steel*)
- Cough drops, ginger chews, ginger tea, and popsicles for sore throat from intubation
- Compression socks, especially if you are flying after your recovery
- Step stool for getting in and out of bed or reaching high shelves



Photo credit: The Gender Spectrum Collection

Additional Information

Studies on satisfaction and outcomes of top surgery:

Bustos VP, Bustos SS, Mascaro A, Del Corral G, Forte AJ, Ciudad P, Kim EA, Langstein HN, Manrique OJ. [Transgender and Gender-nonbinary Patient Satisfaction after Transmasculine Chest Surgery](#). *Plast Reconstr Surg Glob Open*. 2021 Mar 19;9(3)

Nick Esmonde, MD, MPH, Aaron Heston, BS, Breanna Jedrzejewski, MD, MPH, Elie Ramly, MD, Alvin Annen, BS, Jess Guerriero, MSW, MA, Juliana Hansen, MD, Jens Berli, MD, [What is “Nonbinary” and What Do I Need to Know? A Primer for Surgeons Providing Chest Surgery for Transgender Patients](#), *Aesthetic Surgery Journal*, Volume 39, Issue 5, May 2019, Pages NP106–NP112, <https://doi.org/10.1093/asj/sjy166>

Olson-Kennedy J, Warus J, Okonta V, Belzer M, Clark LF. [Chest Reconstruction and Chest Dysphoria in Transmasculine Minors and Young Adults: Comparisons of Nonsurgical and Postsurgical Cohorts](#). *JAMA Pediatr*. 2018;172(5):431–436. doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2017.5440

Stein MJ, Grigor E, Hardy J, Jarmuske M. [Surgical and patient-reported outcomes following double incision and free nipple grafting for female to male gender affirmation: Does obesity make a difference?](#) *Journal of Plastic, Reconstructive & Aesthetic Surgery*. 2021;74(8):1743-1751.

There are several additional online guides and resources for top surgery:

GoodRX Health: [5 Things To Know Before Getting Top Surgery](#)

Folx Health: [Top Surgery 101: Procedures, Cost, and Safety](#)

TopSurgery.net: [How-To Guide: Insurance Coverage for Top Surgery In the United States](#)

TopSurgery.net: [Top Surgery Grants & Financing](#)