

# Gender Affirming Top Surgery

## *With or without a free nipple graft*

*This handout explains what to expect, and how to plan for post-operative care.*

### **What is top surgery?**

Gender affirming top surgery involves removing your breast tissue and reconstructing the skin, nipple, and/or areolas to create a flatter appearing chest.

Despite removal of breast tissue, regular screening mammograms are still recommended. For chest feminization surgery please see Handout "Implant Based Reconstruction."

### **What is a free nipple graft?**

A free nipple graft involves removing your natural nipple and suturing it into the appropriate location on your chest.

### **Post-surgical garment**

- Wear the surgical garment or wrap you were given 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for 4 weeks. Only take the garment off to wash it or to do daily hygiene. This garment should be snug but not painful.
- Your provider may ask you to continue wearing the garment for more than 4 weeks. This will be determined during your post-surgical follow-up appointment.

### **Incision care and hygiene**

#### **With a free nipple graft**

- A thick "bolster" dressing will be sutured over your nipple graft for 1 week after your surgery. This dressing helps your body accept the nipple graft.
- Do not get the bolster dressing wet.

- At your 1 week follow up we will remove the bolster dressing and recommend the following:
  - You may shower but do not allow direct water pressure on your nipple graft.
  - Change the provided yellow gauze dressing (xeroform) 1 time daily.
  - Protect your graft site from the sun. Use sunscreen after it is healed.
  - Do not take a bath, sit in a hot tub, or go swimming until your incisions are fully healed and no scabs remain. This may take 4 to 6 weeks.

### **Without a free nipple graft**

- Remove the compression and outermost bandage 48 hours after surgery, before you shower for the first time. Generally, this dressing is gauze and tape. After showering, replace the compression.
- If your incision has strips of white tape (Steri-Strips) over it, leave the bandage in place until it falls off. If it does not fall off on its own, we will remove it during your first follow up appointment.
- Please take a shower 48 hours after surgery. We recommend daily showers to reduce the risk of infection.
- Use mild soap and wash very gently over your incisions.
- Do not take a bath, sit in a hot tub, or go swimming until your incisions are fully healed and no scabs remain. This may take 4 to 6 weeks.

### **Drains**

If you had drains placed at the time of surgery, we will teach you how to care for them. Please read the handout “Caring for Your JP Drains.”

### **Activities and return to work**

- For 4 weeks, move your arms gently:
  - Do not raise your arms above shoulder height.
  - Do not lift, push, or pull anything that weighs more than 8 pounds (about the weight of a gallon of water). This includes children and pets.
  - Avoid repetitive arm movements such as chores (such as vacuuming, doing dishes and laundry)

- Avoid aerobic exercise (activities that cause heavy breathing or sustained elevated heart rate).
- Walking is encouraged and helpful for healing and rebuilding strength. Start with 3 to 4 walks a day for 5 to 10 minutes each. Gradually increase your distance and length of time as you heal.
- Return to work varies from person to person and depends on the type of work you do. Please discuss with your surgeon what may be best for you.

## Pain control

- Please read the handout “Pain Control After Reconstructive Surgery.”
- Please do not use ice or heat where you had surgery.

## When to contact the clinic

Check your incision every day. Contact our clinic or your doctor if you have:

- Bleeding or drainage that soaks your dressing (hold pressure on the site to lessen bleeding)
- A fever higher than 100.5°F (38°C)
- Shaking and/or chills
- Any signs of infection at your surgical site:
  - Redness
  - Increased swelling
  - Bad-smelling drainage
  - Pus or cloudy-colored drainage
- Nausea and/or vomiting
- New rash
- Pain that is worsening and not improved with your pain medicine

## Questions?

Your questions are important. Contact your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

### During Clinic Hours (Monday through Friday except holidays, 8am to 5pm):

If you have any questions or concerns, we recommend messaging your surgeon through EPIC MyChart. Please include a photo if applicable.

Alternatively, you may call the Center for Reconstructive Surgery at 206-598-1217 option 2.

### Urgent Needs Outside of Clinic Hours

If you have an urgent care need after hours, on weekends, or holidays, please call 206-598-6190 and ask to speak to the plastic surgeon on call.

**If you are experiencing new chest pain or shortness of breath, please call 911.**

**If you are experiencing redness, swelling, pain/cramp, or warmth usually in one limb, this may be signs of a blood clot. Please go to your local ER.**