

Gender-Affirming Top Surgery

With or without a free nipple graft



*Scan for a
digital copy of
this handout.*

*This handout explains what to expect during your top surgery,
and how to plan for your recovery.*

What is top surgery?

Top surgery is gender-affirming surgery to remove breast tissue and reshape your chest to look flatter. The skin, nipples, and areola (the darker area around the nipple) may also be changed during the surgery.

Even though the breast tissue is removed, it's still important to get regular mammograms.

If you are looking for information about top surgery to make your chest look more feminine, please see the handout, "Implant Based Reconstruction".

What is a free nipple graft?

A free nipple graft involves removing your natural nipple and suturing (attaching) it to the new 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 (such as showering). This garment should be snug but not painful.
- Your provider may ask you to continue wearing the garment for more than 4 weeks. They will talk with you about this during your follow-up appointment after surgery.

Incision Care and Hygiene

With a free nipple graft

- A thick "bolster" dressing will be sutured (attached) over your nipple graft for 1 week after your surgery. This dressing helps your nipple successfully attach to your skin..
- **Do not** get the bolster dressing wet.
- At your 1 week follow-up appointment we will remove this dressing. After this appointment:
 - You may shower but do not let water directly hit your nipple graft.
 - Change the provided yellow gauze dressing (xeroform) 1 time each day.
 - 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 (top) bandage 48 hours after surgery, before you shower for the first time. Usually, this dressing is gauze and tape. Put the compression back on after you shower.
- If your incision has strips of white tape (Steri-Strips) over it, leave them in place until they fall 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 Going Back 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 helpful for healing and rebuilding your strength. Start with 3 to 4 walks a day for 5 to 10 minutes each time. Gradually increase your distance and walking time as you heal.

Going back to work varies from person to person and depends on the type of work you do. Please talk with your surgeon about what is best for you.

Pain Control

- Please read the handout “Pain Control After Reconstructive Surgery.”
- 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 bleeding area)
- A fever higher than 100.5°F (38°C)
- Shaking or chills
- Any signs of infection at your surgical area:
 - Redness
 - Increased swelling
 - Bad-smelling drainage (fluid)
 - Pus or cloudy-colored drainage
- Nausea or vomiting
- New rash
- Pain that is worsening and not improved with your pain medicine

If you have new chest pain or shortness of breath, call 911.

If you have redness, swelling, warmth, or pain or cramps usually in 1 limb, this may be signs of a blood clot. Go to the closest emergency room right away.

Questions?

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

During Clinic Hours (Monday to Friday except holidays, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.):

If you have any questions or concerns, send a MyChart message to your surgeon. Please include a photo if needed.

You may also call the Center for Reconstructive Surgery at 206.598.1217, option 2.

Urgent Needs Outside 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.