

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

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.

Pain that is worsening and not improved with your pain medicine
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.