

# Masculinizing Top Surgery

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## What to expect and care after surgery

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### What is masculinizing top surgery?

Masculinizing top surgery is an operation to remove breast tissue from the chest and tighten the skin to give the chest a flatter and more masculine appearance.

Insurance calls this surgery a gender-affirming double mastectomy.

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### What happens before the surgery?

Before your first appointment with the Plastic Surgery team is scheduled, you will work with your gender care doctor and therapist to submit letters of support for your surgery.

You will have 2 appointments with Plastic Surgery before surgery.

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### Appointment 1

At your first appointment, you will meet with your plastic surgeon and plastic surgery nurse. They will talk with you about your goals and how to achieve them based on your body type and chest size.

- Your plastic surgeon will review your medical history and give you a physical exam. If you and your surgeon both decide to schedule surgery, the surgeon will ask you to sign a consent form for the procedure. If you are younger than 18 years old, you will need to have a legal guardian sign this document.
  - Your nurse will review what to expect before and after surgery. This will include information about care after surgery.
  - A surgery scheduler will begin the process of requesting pre-authorization to determine if the surgery is covered by your insurance. If your insurance company approves the request, our surgery scheduling department will call you to schedule appointment 2, your surgery date, and your after surgery appointment. If your insurance denies the request, our insurance processing department will call you. They will refer you to a financial counselor who will let you know what options you have, including self-pay. If you have any questions about the cost of surgery, you can contact our financial counseling department 206-987-3333.
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### Appointment 2

Once insurance approval or a plan for self-payment has been finalized, you will meet with the surgical team in clinic again for a pre-operative appointment. This will be another opportunity to ask questions, prepare for the surgery, and plan recovery.

Do not take aspirin, ibuprofen (Motrin or Advil), naproxen (Aleve) or other non-steroidal anti-inflammatories (NSAIDs) for at least 7 days before the surgery. They can increase the risk of bleeding from the surgical site.

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### To Learn More

- Plastic Surgery  
206-987-2759
- Ask your child's healthcare provider
- [seattlechildrens.org](http://seattlechildrens.org)

### Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line, 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.

### Smoking and vaping

Smoking, vaping and nicotine use interfere with your body's ability to deliver oxygenated blood to the surgical site. This makes it take longer for your wound to heal and can cause surgical complications. If your surgery site is not healing properly, you may require wound care to treat open wounds and possibly additional surgery to remove sick or dead tissue.

The number of surgical complications are much higher for smokers than it is for non-smokers. **For this reason, we do not perform this surgery on active smokers or those consuming nicotine products.**

This restriction applies to all nicotine products and to smoking and vaping marijuana. While we do not encourage its use, non-smoked forms of marijuana are not restricted before or after surgery. This includes edibles, pills, tablets or patches.

We will order a test (urine cotinine) after your consultation to confirm you have stopped using all nicotine products. You have to be nicotine-free at least 4 weeks before the test in order to pass this test (negative test). If your results for the urine cotinine test are positive, your plastic surgeon will not authorize your surgery. We will not request insurance pre-authorization and put you on a surgery waitlist until your test results for nicotine is negative.

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### What happens during surgery?

Surgery is done under general anesthesia. This means that we will give you medicine to make you sleep.

Your plastic surgeon will make incisions and remove your breast tissue. Depending on your body and breast size, your nipples may be resized, repositioned or used as grafts to give your chest a more masculine appearance. Your surgeon will talk with you about this before surgery.

Your plastic surgeon will put closed suction drains under your skin to remove excess fluid from the surgical site. This is to help with healing. We will remove the drains when the drain output drops to a certain level. There may also be steri-strips, skin glue, and stitches in your skin where your plastic surgeon made your incisions.

Most people go home on the day of surgery without staying in the hospital (outpatient procedure). Your plastic surgeon will talk with you about your individual care plan.

When your doctor says you are ready to go home, you must have someone to drive you home. **You cannot drive yourself home.**

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### After surgery care at home

- You will need help doing even simple things at home for at least 1 to 2 days.
- Get plenty of rest and eat healthy food.
- Do not drink alcohol when taking pain medicine. Even when not taking pain medicine, do not consume alcohol for at least 3 weeks after surgery. This is because alcohol causes extra fluid to get trapped in your body tissue (fluid retention).
- We strongly recommend that you not resume smoking or using nicotine products. If you do resume after surgery, do not smoke or use nicotine products for at least 6 weeks after surgery.

### What should my activity level be?

- Start walking as soon as possible. Walking helps to reduce swelling and lowers the chance of blood clots.
- At your appointment 5 to 7 days after the surgery, we will talk with you about what activities are OK to resume. You will need to avoid strenuous activity for 4 to 6 weeks. This includes avoiding anything that raises your heart rate, lifting anything over 5 pounds, and repetitive activity.
- Avoid sexual activity for at least 2 weeks.

### Will I feel pain?

- You will likely feel pain in your chest area after surgery. We partner with you to prevent and relieve pain as much as possible. Take pain medicine as prescribed. Do not take aspirin or any products containing aspirin unless approved by your surgeon. Do not take ibuprofen (Motrin or Advil), naproxen (Aleve) or other non-steroidal anti-inflammatories (NSAIDs) for at least 7 days after the surgery or until approved to do so by your surgeon. See our handout “Acute Pain” [seattlechildrens.org/pdf/PE503.pdf](http://seattlechildrens.org/pdf/PE503.pdf)
- Prescription pain medicines (narcotics) are addicting and can be abused. See our handout “Safe Use and Disposal of Medicines (Narcotics)” [seattlechildrens.org/pdf/PE3140.pdf](http://seattlechildrens.org/pdf/PE3140.pdf).
- Decreased activity and taking pain medicine can cause constipation. To prevent this, it is helpful to eat raw fruit and drink lots of fluids.
- Swelling, bruising and soreness of the chest is normal after surgery. This is temporary and will decrease after a few weeks. All swelling and bruising should be gone in 3 to 6 months. However, a temporary loss of sensation or numbness may last for up to a year.

### How do I take care of my incisions?

Follow these directions to keep your incisions clean:

Look at your incisions closely every day. Check for signs of infection, including:

- Redness
- Swelling
- Drainage at the incision site with a bad smell (foul odor).

If you have nipple grafts for your surgery, you will have bolster dressings in place. Bolster dressings are made of gauze and are used to help nipple grafts heal. They will be stitched in place and removed at your visit 5 to 7 days after surgery. Your drains will be held in place by stitches in your skin next to the insertion site.

If you have steri-strips, leave them in place until they fall off on their own.

After your clinic visit 5 to 7 days after-surgery, wear your chest compression vest all day, every day, for 6 weeks.

### What is a compression vest?

A compression vest helps to reduce bleeding and fluid collections around your incisions. We will give you a compression vest at your clinic visit 5 to 7 days after surgery. You will wear the vest for 6 weeks.

Depending on the size of your upper body, you will receive:



**MVS Short Vest**



**MHV Sleeveless Vest**

The MHV Sleeveless Vest is longer. It can be more comfortable for some people because the longer length does not irritate the mid-section.

Ordering information for additional vests, sizes and measurements can be found on the Marena website:

[recovery.marena.com/collections/tank-tops-vests/male](https://recovery.marena.com/collections/tank-tops-vests/male)

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### When can I shower?

No showering until after your clinic visit 5 to 7 days after surgery.

After that, it is OK to remove your chest compression vest to shower, even if your drains remain in place.

We will remove the drains when they have less than 30 ml of fluid per day for 2 days in a row. If your drains are not ready to be removed during your first clinic visit, we will have you return to clinic later for removal.

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### When can I take a bath or swim?

No baths, swimming or soaking for 4 weeks, and while stitches or drains are in place.

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### When can I drive?

You can begin driving only when cleared by your surgery team at a follow up appointment. You cannot drive until you are no longer taking prescription pain medication and you are able to fully move your arms (full range of motion).

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### When can I return to work or school?

You should plan to be out from work and school for about 5 weeks to heal and regain your strength.

Some people need longer to recover than others. Ask your employer for some flexibility in exactly when you return.

Stay away from any job or sport that risks a blow to your chest for at least 6 weeks.

### How do I care for my scar?

Once your incisions have healed, use a strong sunblock (SPF 30 or greater) if sun exposure is unavoidable. Carefully protecting your scars from the sun for the first year after surgery prevents them from being permanently more noticeable.

Your doctor may recommend silicone gel or sheeting to help your scars heal thinner and flatter.

For more details about scar care, read our scar care handout [seattlechildrens.org/pdf/PE2043.pdf](http://seattlechildrens.org/pdf/PE2043.pdf).

### What will my chest look like?

- The shape of your chest will be flatter and more masculine.
- It will take 3 or more months for the surgical swelling to go down fully and to see your final chest shape.
- Depending on the type of surgery you have, you will have scars on your chest that will take 12 to 18 months to reach their final appearance. Every person scars differently. Your surgeon will talk with you about what to expect.

### When should I call the doctor?

Call your healthcare team if you have:

- Fever higher than 101.5°F (38.6°C)
- Increased swelling, bruising or redness around your incisions
- Significant swelling of your chest that is different from the other side
- Severe or increased pain not relieved by medicine
- Yellowish or greenish drainage from the incisions
- Drainage with a bad smell (foul odor)
- Any side effects to medicines, such as rash, nausea or headache
- Bleeding from the incisions that is difficult to control with light pressure
- Pain in your lower leg, chest pain, shortness of breath, cough with blood, blood streaked mucus or phlegm
- Vomiting more than once

### How do I call?

- **During weekday business hours:** Call the Plastic Surgery Clinic 206-987-2759, option 4.
- **On evenings and weekends:** Call Seattle Children's Hospital operator 206-987-2000.  
Ask to page the on-call Plastic Surgery provider.

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