

Gender Affirming Surgeries Preparation Guide



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SHERBOURNE HEALTH

Gender Affirming Surgeries Preparation Guide

This document serves as a recommendation resource for Ontarians considering gender affirming surgeries. It is important to consult with your surgeon prior to surgery to ensure proper preparation and optimal recovery. This document is not intended to replace your surgeon's directive.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

Employment and Financial Support

- Notify your employer in advance and apply for paid sick leave if applicable
 - » Most employees have the right to take up to three days of unpaid job-protected leave each calendar year due to a personal illness, injury or medical emergency. This is known as sick leave. Special rules apply to some occupations [1].
 - » If an employment contract, including a collective agreement, provides a greater right or benefit than the sick leave standard under the [Employment Standards Act](#) (ESA), then the terms of the contract apply instead of the standard [2].
 - » EI [Sickness Benefits](#) – this may be an option for those who are employed and meet the requirements for obtaining these benefits



Gender Affirming Surgeries Preparation Guide

Costs Associated

Consider costs that are associated with your surgery that are not covered by OHIP (Ontario Health Insurance Plan) and plan accordingly around financial need.

- » Example: OHIP will only cover the mastectomy part of chest surgery. Any chest contouring must be paid by the client and will vary from surgeon to surgeon.
- Purchase any supplies or recovery items your surgeon has detailed or recommended to you.
- If you are having surgery at a location that is not close to where you live, you will need to cover the costs of travel and accommodations. Consider preparing in advance:
 - » Book a hotel room ahead of time
 - » Budget for meals
 - » Budget for travel costs (bus, train or plane, or gas and parking if driving)
 - » Considerations around arriving a day early, and staying for several days after your surgery if applicable

Health Check

Mental Health Supports

- Locating mental health supports such as a therapist or counsellor can be helpful to some individuals.
 - » Numerous studies have shown the psychological benefits of gender affirming surgeries [3, 4]. Gender affirming surgery can be associated with improved psychological distress, smoking cessation and reduced suicidal ideation, among many other mental health improvements [5].
- Successful gender affirming care requires a multi-disciplinary approach comprised of medical, surgical, and mental health providers [6]. Whether that be prior to surgery or after surgery, having someone to speak to about your mental health successes or challenges can be quite beneficial.
 - » To locate a 2SLGBTQ mental health service provider local to you, visit our 2SLGBTQ service provider directory
- Community support can also be extremely helpful. That can look like connecting with community organization or partners that have a commitment to providing competent services to the 2SLGBTQ community or trusted support people in your lives (friends, family, partners, etc.)

Self-Care Activities

Committing to self-care can be an integral part of your surgery preparation and recovery process. This can include activities that cater to your physical, mental, and emotional needs.

- » Example: going for a walk, taking a hot shower/bath, meeting up with friends/family, writing an affirming letter to yourself to read after surgery, journaling your thoughts and emotions before and after surgery, organizing your recovery space, arts and crafts or ceremonial practices like smudging or dry brushing.

Gender Affirming Surgeries Preparation Guide

Smoking Cessation

- » If you smoke, whether that be cigarettes, vaping, or cannabis, it is advisable to quit or cutback at least four weeks prior to your surgery date.
- » Some people may need to stop smoking for a longer period of time prior to and after their surgery.
 - » Smoking can slow down the healing process and extend recovery time.
 - » Smoking may also reduce blood flow, leading to tissue necrosis
- » Consult with your surgeon prior to surgery around smoking cessation and what supports may be available to you
- » Always follow your surgeon's directive with smoking cessation and alcohol and substance consumption

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER ASKING YOUR SURGICAL TEAM/SURGEON

Your surgical consultation is an opportunity to ask your surgeon and/or surgical team (this can include administrative staff such as the individual(s) responsible for scheduling your surgery) questions to help inform how to optimize your preparedness and recovery for the best possible outcome.

Some logistical questions to consider may include:

- What can you bring with you to the hospital/surgical clinic and what will need to be left at home
- Who can accompany you to the hospital/surgical clinic
- What time you will need to arrive
- Where parking is located (if applicable)
- What entrance to check in at

Some surgical questions to consider may include:

- How long will I need to fast (not consuming any food or drink) for before surgery, if applicable?
- Expectations around body appearance after surgery
- How long will recovery take?
- When can I (re)engage in sexual activity?
- What complications should I anticipate and how to prepare?
- Will I need more time off from work (if applicable) if I run into complications?
- Who to follow up with if I have complications (surgeon, primary care provider, etc.)?
- How will I manage scarring (creams, massage techniques, etc.)?
- Realistic expectations around lifetime maintenance after surgery (example, continued dilation after vaginoplasty)?
- Roughly how long will I be in surgery?

Gender Affirming Surgeries Preparation Guide

Transportation

- Transportation to and from the hospital/surgical clinic
 - » Transportation to and from the hospital/surgical clinic can be a barrier for those with financial needs. There are programs available to assist with covering transportation costs:
 - Hope Air
 - Northern Health Travel Grant Program
 - » Consider people within your community that could assist you with your transportation needs
 - Transportation to and from hospital/surgical clinic and follow-up appointments
 - Rides to and from event spaces, community groups, ceremonial gatherings, etc.
 - Transportation for completing errands after surgery (groceries, pharmacy, pet supplies, household supplies)

Care Givers

It is important to consider who will be in your care circle as this is a vital part of your overall recovery. Choosing individuals who are safe to be around, reliable and care about your well-being are important aspects of picking the right people. Studies show that lack of resources for recovery are amongst some of the top concerns for individuals considering gender affirming surgeries [7], and the need for assistance in surgical recovery for those who are post-op. [8] Ensure that you ask your caregiver(s) if they are available and willing to support you during your recovery. Don't assume that someone will be willing to be your care giver because of your relationship to them.

What are your needs and how will you communicate them effectively?

- » Clearly identify which activities you will need help with, and check in with your care giver(s) around your needs if they change throughout your recovery
 - » Be proactive with your communication. If something is not working for you, communicate it
- If you are considering more than one caregiver, it may be helpful to assign specific tasks to each individual care giver

Needs to consider:

- » Who is consistently reliable in my care circle?
- » Who can provide emotional support when needed?
- » Who helps me feel safe and relaxed?
- » Who brings me joy, and laughter?



Gender Affirming Surgeries Preparation Guide

Meals and Chores

- During your recovery period your physical activity will be limited. The duration of your physical limitations will be directly related to the surgery you are having. Consider involving your care givers to assist you with daily house chores and meal preparations.
 - » Prepare meals in advance and freeze them for future use
 - » Consider preparing arrangements with your care providers to assist with basic household chores and duties such as laundry, housekeeping, and pet care.

Recovery and Recovery Spaces

- A safe space to rest and recover is an important part of your surgical aftercare. Some areas to consider are:
 - » Where will you be recovering and who will assist you?
Example: cups, plates, toiletry, etc. that are stored in high reaching cabinets or spaces are moved to shelves where it is accessible without needing to overextend.
 - » If not at home, how long will you stay and will there be any costs associated with it (hotels, Airbnb, hostels, etc.)
 - » You may be provided with or advised to obtain a compression garment after surgery to help reduce swelling. It is important to follow the surgeon's directive on how often and when to wear it.
 - » Preparing clean bedding and clothing in advance may be helpful. If you have a trusted care giver, this is something you can delegate to them to manage for you.
 - » It is likely that you will have follow up appointments with your surgeon and/or primary care provider after surgery. Consider arranging transportation to and from medical appointments.

Self-Care Activities

- Prior to surgery, your surgeon may provide you with an advanced directive that will include instructions on to do and what items to purchase before your surgery.
 - » Purchase recovery supplies before hand
 - It may be helpful to purchase medical supplies and other items to assist your recovery before your surgery date. This can consist of medications, support and compression garments, and wound care supplies.
 - » Bring the directive with you on your surgery date

Gender Affirming Surgeries Preparation Guide

CHECKLISTS

What to Pack Prior to Surgery

- » Prepare a list of medications. Include the name, dose and how often you take each one
- » Consider packing necessary medical items such as walkers, crutches, eyedrops, CPAP/BiPap devices, inhaler or any other medical items and/or devices
- » Pack any necessary medical identification cards such as insurance, or prescriptions Money for prescriptions after surgery (if required)
- » If you are staying in a hospital or hotel to recovery after surgery, you should consider bringing toiletries such as:
 - Toothbrush & toothpaste
 - Hairbrush and/or combs
 - Sanitary wipes

Leaving the Hospital

Before you leave the hospital, you should know:

- » When your next follow-up appointment will be, or when you will need to book one
- » What steps to take, and who to contact if you have an issue
- » How to take care of your surgical site (always follow the surgeons' directive)
- » Proper and adequate pain management techniques and regimens
- » How to manage constipation, if necessary
- » Understanding post-operative activity levels, and restrictions as recommended

Ensure that before you leave the hospital, you have:

- » Personal items and belonging
- » All your medications and medical items/devices
- » Any new prescriptions
- » Electronic devices such as cellphone, tablet, ear/headphones, etc.
- » Discharge papers, if provided
- » Resources, information booklets/packages provided to you

Gender Affirming Surgeries Preparation Guide

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The following documents were also helpful in writing this guide:

- Trans Care BC: Provincial Health Service Authority [Internet]. Surgery [cited 2024 July 15]. Available from: <https://www.transcarebc.ca/surgery>
- Kaiser Permanente Southern California [Internet]. Gender Affirming Surgery Preparation Guide [cited 2025 February 6]. Available from: https://mydoctor.kaiserpermanente.org/ncal/Images/META_PHALLO-Preparation-Guide_tcm75-2407827.pdf
- OHSU Surgical Services [Internet]. Preparing for your surgery [cited 2024 July 15]. Available from: <https://www.ohsu.edu/sites/default/files/2024-06/Preparing-For-Your-Surgery-Guide-2024.pdf>

DISCLAIMER

The information provided here is generalized and is not medical advice. It is recommended that all patients have a pre-operative consultation with their surgeon to receive individualized information including the specific surgeon's technique, complication rates and recommendations. This is a dynamic document that is subject to change, as the knowledge of gender affirming surgeries changes.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This document was created by Rainbow Health Ontario using evidence-based literature. This document is not meant to replace the directive given by your surgeon and/ or surgical team.

Published September 20 2024