



FREE GUIDE

Gender Affirming Surgery

PHALLOPLASTY





WELCOME

This guide does not replace an appointment with your doctor, physiotherapist or other health care practitioner. This is general education and does not take into consideration your unique health. If you're unsure if the information provided here is relevant to you, please contact your doctor or healthcare provider.



What is a phalloplasty?

Phalloplasty is a gender affirming pelvic surgery that people can get when they want a phallus that is able to penetrate during sex. There are usually multiple surgeries involved in this process and the person will need their uterus and cervix removed (optional removal of ovaries) at least 6 months prior to the phalloplasty.

During the phalloplasty, people have urethral lengthening so they can stand up while urinating. A full thickness skin graft is taken from another part of the body to form the skin around the shaft (typically the forearm) and a partial skin graft will be taken from somewhere else to cover up the area the full thickness graft came from (typically the thigh). Some folks will also choose to have a scrotum created from external genitalia and they have the option of testicular implants as well as an erectile device at a later surgery. Sometimes the urethra will be repositioned 6 months after the initial surgery.

These are major surgeries and you will need time to recover. It's usually about 12 weeks until you are returning to normal life activities but can take much longer (between a year or two depending on complications) before full recovery. Use this guide to prep and recover from each stage, although the subsequent surgeries will likely be quicker recovery times.



How do I prepare for a phalloplasty

There are things you can do before your surgery to optimize the recovery period.
Here is a checklist of some ideas.

Get your recovery space ready

- If you're employed, figure out how much time you'll need off work and arrange it.
- Apply for medical employment insurance.
- Make sure all your bills are paid for a few weeks.
- Prep and freeze 2 weeks worth of meals.
- Arrange a bed/ couch or resting area close to the bathroom so you don't need to move far.
- Buy pads/ liners to have at home incase of catheter leaking.
- Have 2 weeks worth of comfortable clean clothes at home.
- Arrange supplies you may need for spiritual or ceremonial practices such as smudging.
- Have activities at home that you can do through recovery such as colouring, reading etc but also conscious of the fact that your secondary surgical site will not be as functional (your wrist and hand movement on the side of the skin graft will be decreased).

Pack your Bag

- Prepare to take comfy, loose clothing
- Phone and charger
- Toiletries
- An inflatable donut to sit on

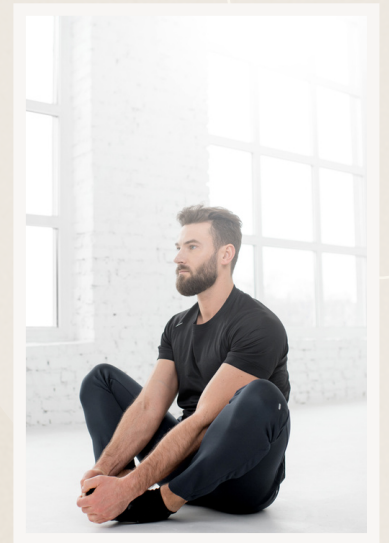




How do I prepare for a phalloplasty

Medical and Logistics

- Follow your surgeons advice on stopping any medications or substances and buying recommended supplies.
- Have a next of kin the hospital can call if they need and who can drive you home when you're discharged.
- Pre-book any follow up appointments if you're able to
- Do any self care tasks you need, take artificial nails and nail polish off so the pulse oximeter works better.



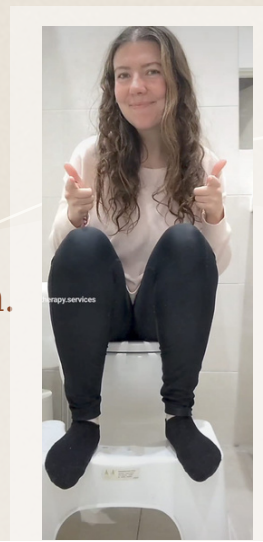
Pelvic Physio Prep

Exercises

- Practice deep belly breathing often and get comfortable with how it feels (can be harder to do post op).
- Practice lengthening your pelvic floor actively as you INHALE (think, bearing down as if to pass gas or initiate a bowel movement, widening between the sit bones, uncurling the tailbone, etc. As you exhale, just let everything relax back to normal.
- Imagery: while breathing or meditating, close your eyes and imagine your new phallus- what does it feel like, what does it look like, how does it function? Imaging how it feels to use it. Do this regularly leading up to the phalloplasty to improve sensation post op.

Other considerations

- Buy stool softeners, prune juice, chia seeds to make chia seed pudding, and have easy access to water to prevent constipation.
- Get a squatty potty or stool for your feet to rest on and make bowel movements easier (this is a good habit to have anyways! Practice it before surgery to get comfortable).



While recovering in hospital

When you're recovering in hospital, it'll be important to listen to your inpatient healthcare team. It can be useful even immediately after your operation to continue the imagery exercise you started in the preparation phase. You can also try to take deep breaths often so that your lungs and muscles in your abdomen continue to function well. If you're able to, try to look at your new anatomy during dressing changes. This will help your nervous system connect to your new phallus.



You will have a catheter inserted while staying in hospital and when you go home for a few weeks. Your healthcare team at the hospital should show you how to manage the catheter and keep it and your whole pelvic area clean.

Your secondary surgical site will need to recover as well. The rehabilitation team for scar management may give you some directions or initial exercises to do as your scar is healing.



POST OP PHALLOPLASTY (AT HOME)



It'll take some time for the swelling to go down in the pelvis. It can take up to a year or more for full recovery. In the meantime, you can go through stages of getting back to your normal.

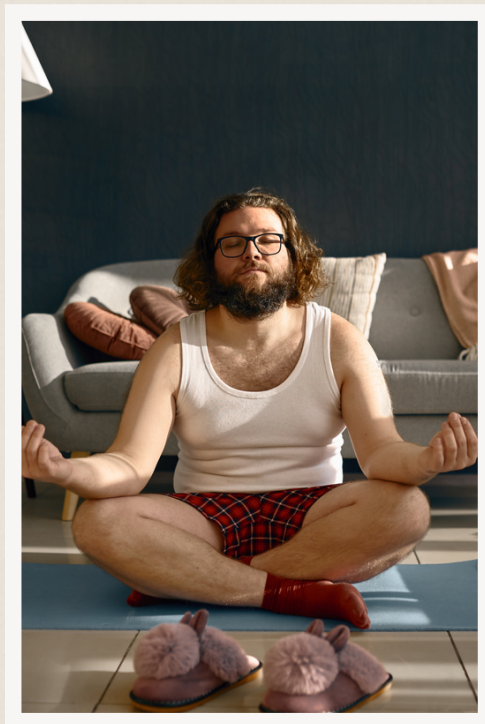
Stage 1: Rest (1-2 weeks)

Your body has gone through a major operation and you're going to need time to rest. Follow post op orders about how often to clean your phallus and any other directions including when to take medication. **Follow directions on caring for your catheter which may remain in place for a few weeks.** Avoid heavy lifting. Keep taking deep belly breaths, look and touch your new anatomy (gently) as well as rest your body.



Bowel Movements

Try to avoid straining on the toilet and use your foot stool/ squatty potty. Focus on deep inhales when having a bowel movement and **avoid holding your breath.** Stool softeners, chia seed pudding, prune juice and staying hydrated can all make bowel movements more easy to pass during this time.



Exercise



You can walk if you can tolerate it but try not to overdo it. Find easy activities you can do from your couch or bed and reach out to people on the phone or social media for some connection. Meditation can be a great activity during this time.

Swelling

Ice applied to the surgery site (with a barrier such as clothing, a towel or blanket), for 20 minutes every hour or so through the day can help with swelling.

Stage 1 & 2

Secondary Surgical Sites

Most people who have a phalloplasty done in Canada will have a full thickness forearm graft and a partial thickness thigh graft done during the surgery. These areas will need care and attention to recover just like your neophallus.

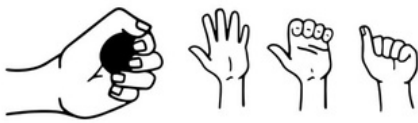
Follow wound care advice from your medical team and directions for dressing changes/ cleaning.



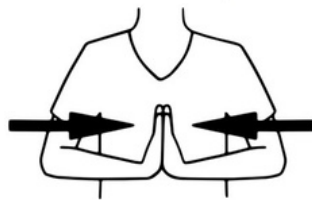
4.10 LEG AND ARM EXERCISES

Exercises should be done 4 times a day for 5 to 10 minutes using the following techniques:

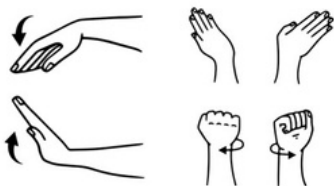
1-Compression of the ball with your hand



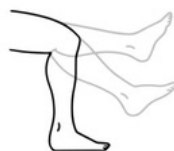
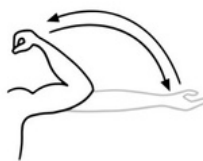
2-Hand to hand compression



3-Hand and ankle bending and extension



4- Arm and leg bending and extension



These exercises are from GRS in Montreal's Phalloplasty Guide. Until the grafts are fully healed, avoid heavy lifting and high intensity activity. Wash your hands often to prevent infection.

Stage two: gentle movement(3-8 weeks)

Once you're starting to feel a bit more energized after a week or two, you can start doing some very gentle movements and easy stretches. A physiotherapist can go through specific stretches that suit your recovery if you have the ability to reach out to one.

Practice your pelvic floor lengthening with breathing coordination a few times per day. When your scar has closed, you should start massaging the area to prevent adhesions.



You can start going for longer walks if you can tolerate (*gradually* work up to walking for 1 hour per day) and handling more tasks around the home. Keep lifting to a minimum and **when you have to lift, exhale at the same time that you're lifting.**

Gentle restorative yoga can also be a good activity for this time.



Stage 3: 8-12 weeks +



While you may feel like things are getting back to normal (or not), it's important to remember that your body has gone through a lot. It may take longer before you feel comfortable lifting heavy things or doing your usual tasks. You may also feel a wide range of emotions and all of them are valid. Reach out to your local trans support organizations (Trans Care BC or Skipping Stone in Alberta) to see what help is available to you.



Take it one step at a time, get back into your activities gradually. Give yourself lots of grace.

You should be safe to self-manipulate your penis for pleasure after 6 weeks, however, it's recommended to wait until 8 weeks before anal or oral sex. After the erectile device implantation surgery people can usually resume sexual activity around 4-6 weeks but it's important to listen to the advice from your particular surgeon.

It's normal to "spray everywhere" when you pee after phalloplasty. This should improve as the swelling decreases but if it's persisting more than 6 months, reach out to your doctor.



Stage 3: 8-12 weeks +

Graft sites

Once your graft sites have fully healed, you want to start wearing a compression sleeve to promote healing, and gradually doing more normal activities with your hand, wrist and elbow. Progress stretching, scar massage and very gradually increase the weight you can take through that limb. A physiotherapist can guide you with individual advice on the function of your particular graft sites.



Sensory System

The sensation in your phallus as well as your secondary graft sites will take time to return and the ability to reach orgasm will differ between people. Practice touching the area, once scars have healed, with different textures and use vibration. Continue the imagery exercises you started pre-op.



Good luck on your journey!

We understand this is a long road for someone to be on and it can be full of many emotions, challenges, euphoria and more. Having a healthcare team you can trust will help make the recovery smoother and pelvic health physios can be a valuable addition to your team. We wish you all the joy in this chapter of your life!



NEED MORE SUPPORT?

Shine

Therapy Services



Shine Therapy Services is a telehealth physiotherapy service in Western Canada. Catherine MacGillivray can treat any adult musculoskeletal condition and also specializes in gender affirming care, pediatric physio and pelvic health for both kids and adults. If you have a video calling device and reliable internet, you can access our service! Shine Therapy Services works hard to be a safe space for gender affirming care we and hope to improve accessibility to inclusive physiotherapy. Shine Therapy Services helps folks across many traditional and unceded territories covering all of what is now known as BC and Alberta. We are honoured to work and play on this land and are committed to reconciliation, decolonization, and anti-racism.