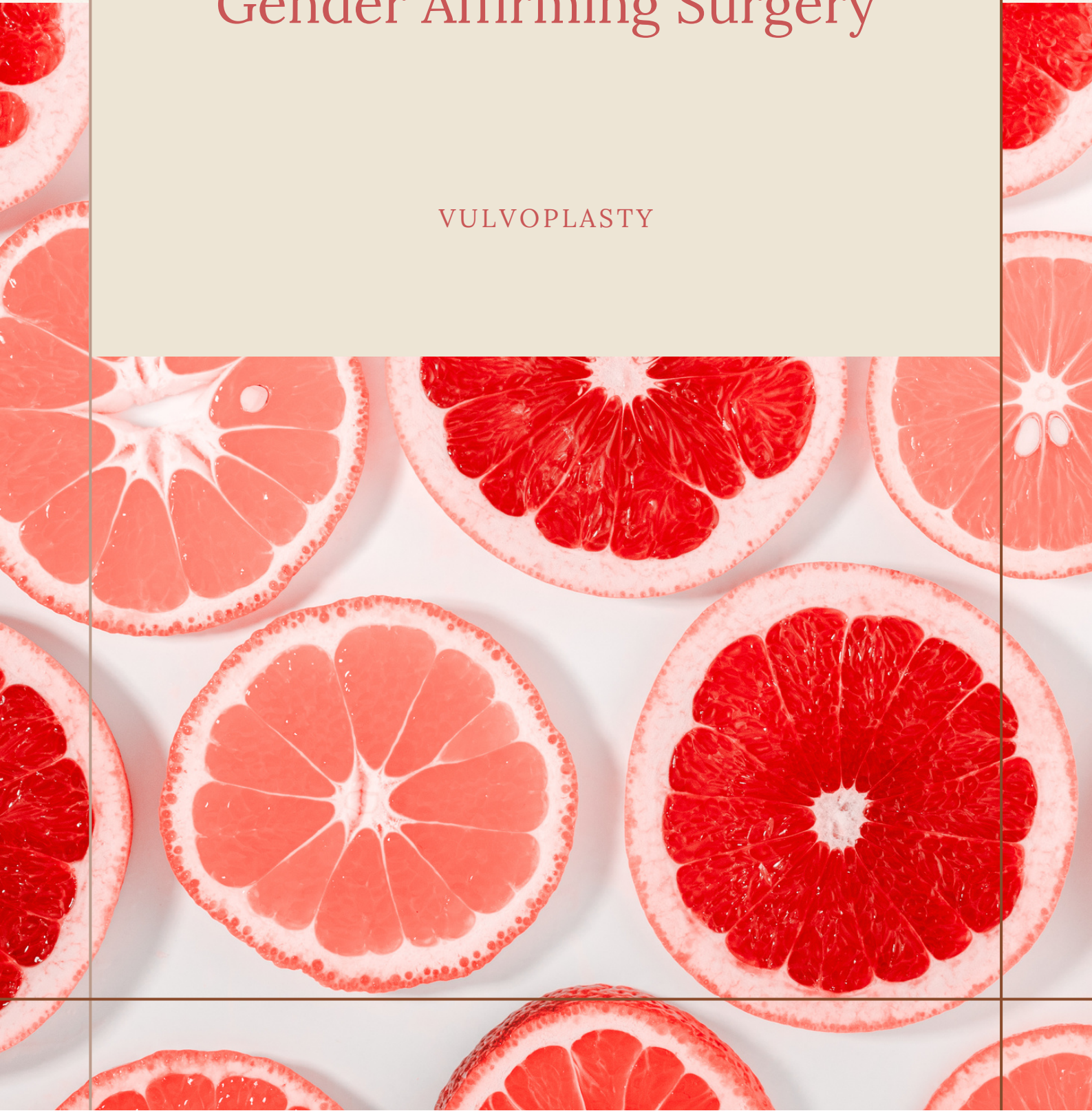




FREE GUIDE

# Gender Affirming Surgery

VULVOPLASTY







## 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 vulvoplasty?

Zero depth vaginoplasty or vulvoplasty, is one of the gender affirming pelvic surgery options for people who want the appearance of a vulva. After surgery, there won't be a penis or testicles and the person will instead have a vulva. There won't be an cavity opening for penetration but there will be a urethral opening for peeing. The person will have a clitoris and most people who undergo this procedure can orgasm through clitoral stimulation.

The recovery from a zero depth vaginoplasty is often easier than the recovery from the creation of a neovagina in a full depth surgery and tends to have less complications. That being said, it is still a major surgery and will need time to recover (8-12 weeks before you are getting back to your usual activities and longer for swelling to go down).





# How do I prepare for a vulvoplasty

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 a week or two 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. 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.

## Pack your Bag

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



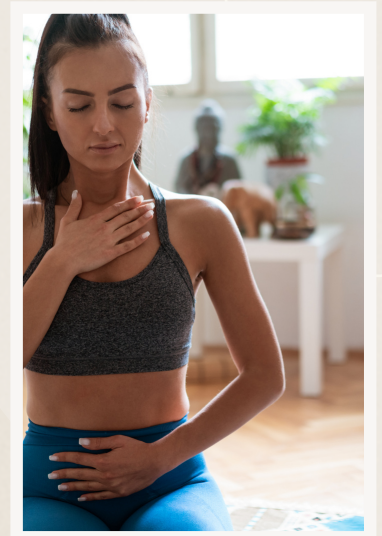




# How do I prepare for a vulvoplasty

## Medical and Logistics

- ☐ Follow your surgeons advice on stopping any medications 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 anatomy- what does it feel like, what does it look like, how does it function? Do this regularly leading up to the vulvoplasty to improve sensation post op.

### Other considerations

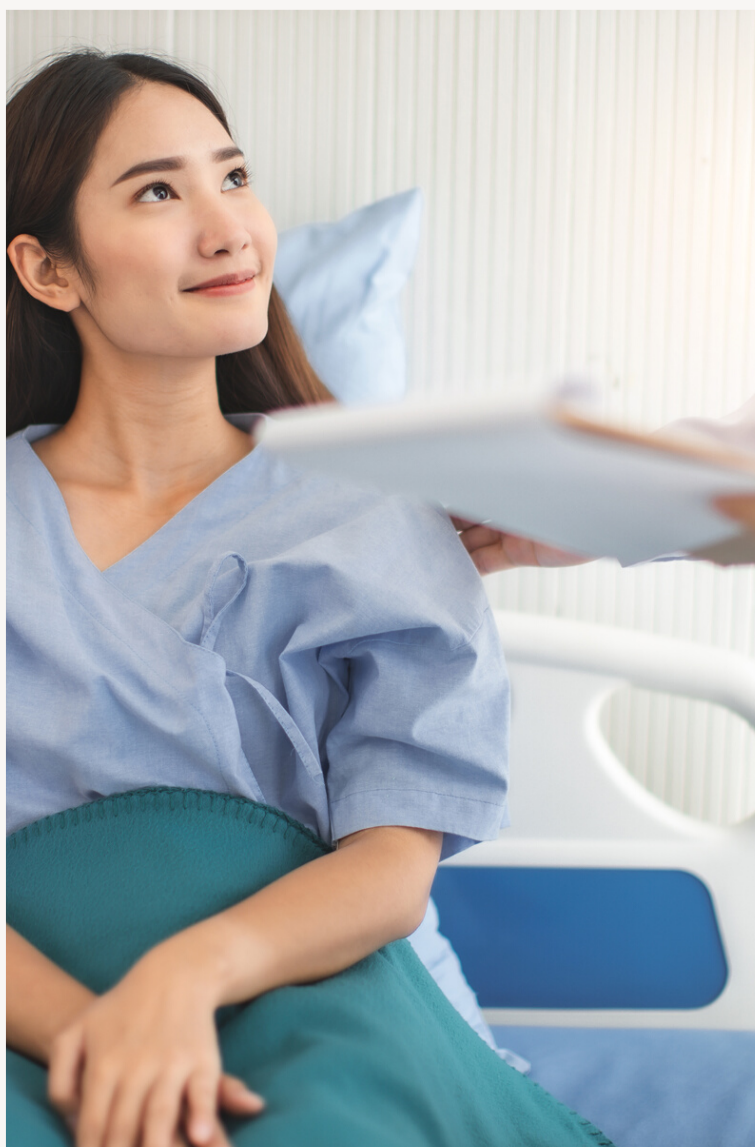
- ☐ Buy stool softeners, prune juice, chia seeds to make chia seed pudding, and a water bottle to prevent constipation.
- ☐ Have a "squatty potty" or stool for your feet to make bowel movements easier (this is a good habit to have anyways!) Practice it before your operation to get comfortable with it.





# 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 vulva.







# POST OP VULVOPLASTY (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 neo-vulva and any other directions including when to start taking normal medication again. Avoid lifting heavy things. Keep taking deep belly breaths, look and touch your vulva (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. Work on pelvic floor lengthening as you did pre op. 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 two: gentle movement(2-8 weeks)

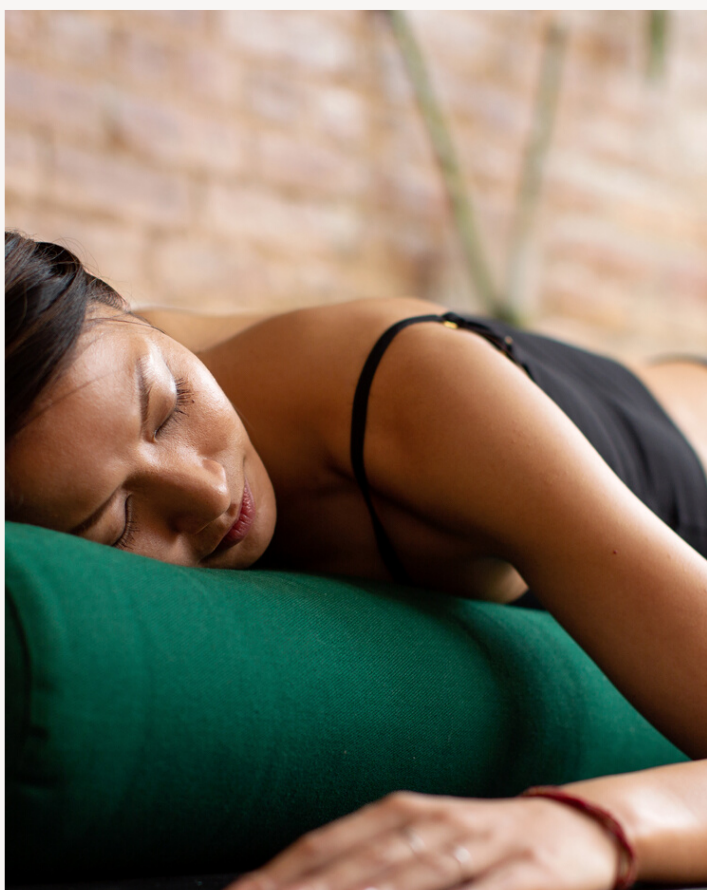
Once you're starting to feel a bit more energized after a week or two, you can start doing some very gentle movements and easy stretches. A physiotherapist can go through specific stretches that suit your recovery if you have the ability to reach out to one.

Try doing the deep breathing with pelvic floor lengthening while doing gentle stretches for your legs and hips.



You can start going for longer walks if you can tolerate it 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 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. If you participate in sports, gym or other exercise, just start going back slowly. Start with extra light weights, slower jogs etc. and work your way back over the course of a few months.

You should be safe to engage in anal and oral sex after 3 months. Prior to this, you can use a vibrator for stimulation if it feels good.

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







## Good luck on your journey!

We understand this is such a big journey 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 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.