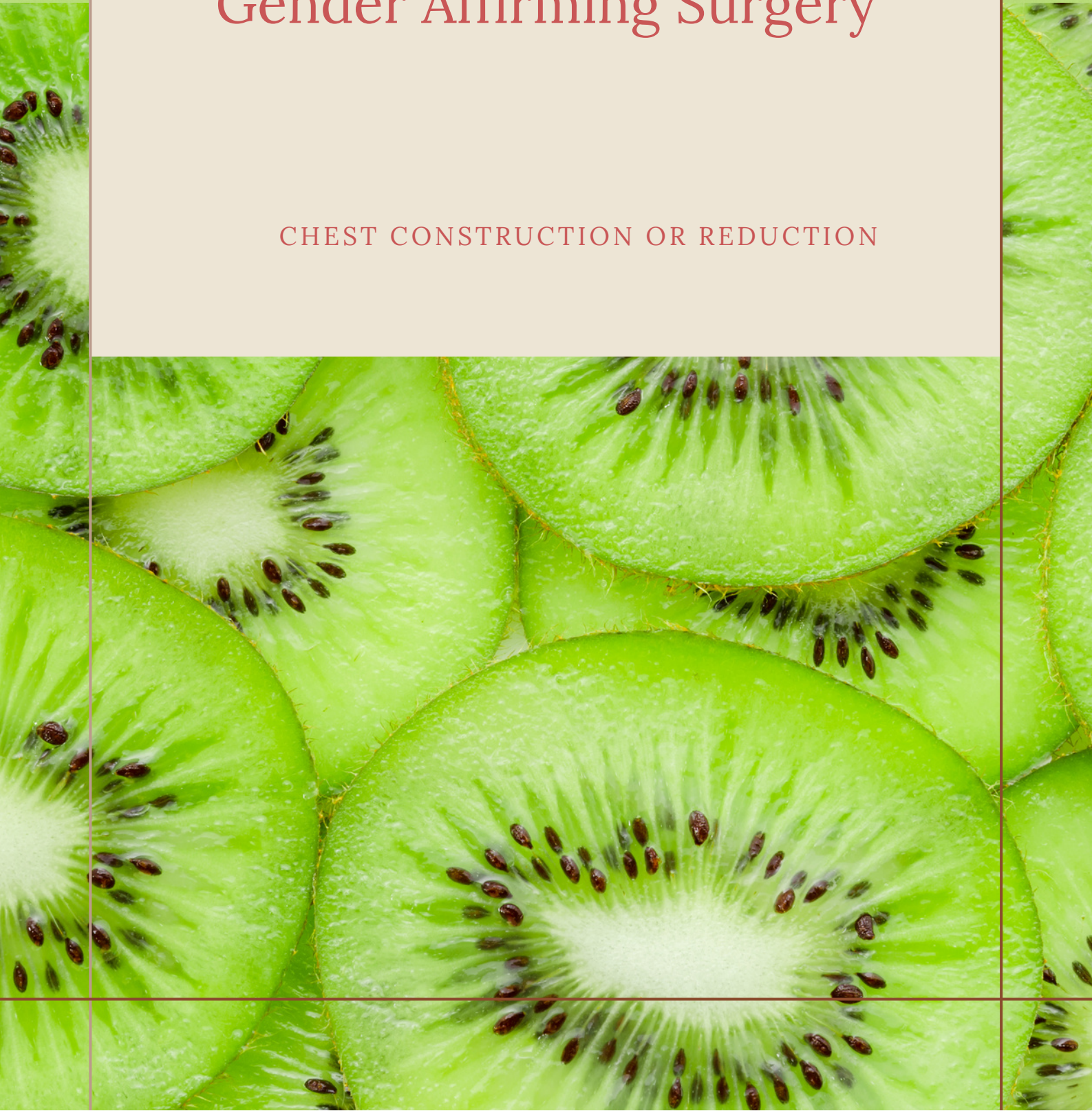




FREE GUIDE

Gender Affirming Surgery

CHEST CONSTRUCTION OR REDUCTION





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 chest construction or reduction?

Chest construction and reduction surgeries remove breast tissue from the individual based on their outcome goals. Some folks choose to have a reduction if they still want breasts but just a smaller size. Other people may choose to remove all the breast tissue for a look that is typically seen as more masculine. Recovery times will vary depending on how much tissue is removed, what type of incisions the surgeon had to use and if there are any complications.



How do I prepare for chest construction or reduction

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.
- 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





How do I prepare for a chest construction or reduction

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. This will help minimize risk of constipation post surgery.
- Imagery: while breathing or meditating, close your eyes and imagine your new anatomy- what does it feel like, what does it look like? Do this regularly leading up to the surgery to improve sensation post op.

Other considerations

Even in chest surgery, there is a risk of constipation from general anesthetic and pain killers. These tips can help make this easier.

- Buy stool softeners, prune juice, chia seeds to make chia seed pudding, and have easy access to water.
- 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 chest during dressing changes. This will help your nervous system connect to your new anatomy.





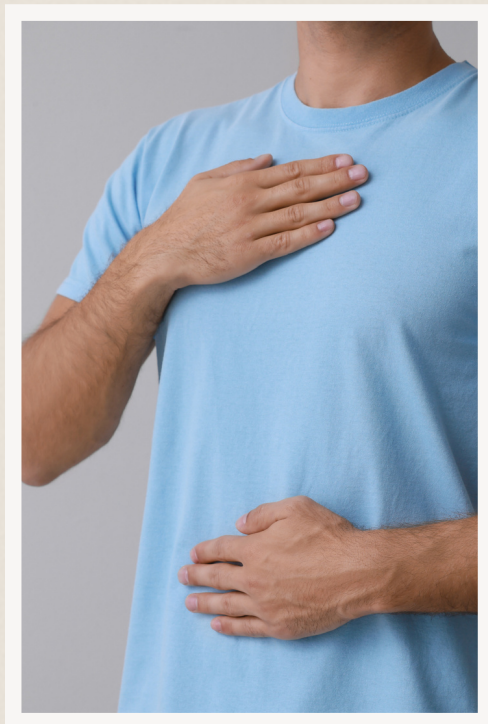
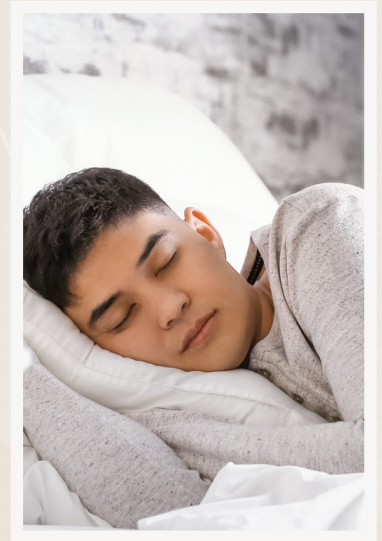
POST OP CHEST CONSTRUCTION OR REDUCTION (AT HOME)



It'll take some time for the swelling to go down and for you to feel comfortable getting back to normal activities. It can take up to a few months for full recovery. Emerging evidence supports limiting arm movements above shoulder height for the first 6 months after a full mastectomy (double incision) when the goal is to attain what is typically seen as a masculine appearance. This tends to help with scarring. In the meantime, you can go through stages of getting back to your normal. Keyhole and chest reduction surgeries can likely move through this quicker but listen to the advice from your medical team.

Stage 1: Rest (3 weeks)

Your body has gone through a big operation and you're going to need time to rest. Follow post op orders about how often to clean around the incisions and any other directions including when to take medication. You may go home with a drain attached to the incision. Follow instructions on how to empty and clean around the drain. **Avoid heavy lifting and lifting your arms above shoulder height.** Keep taking deep belly breaths, look and touch your new anatomy (gently). Most people will be ready to return to work and gentle activity after 2-3 weeks.



You'll have to wear the elastic bandage for about a month after surgery if you had a full mastectomy and it can only be taken off when you shower.

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 should try to 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 also be a great activity during this time.

Swelling

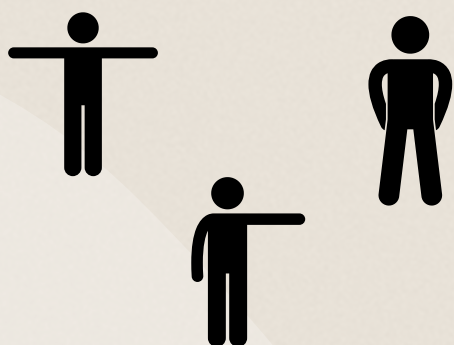
Ice applied to the surgery site (with a barrier such as clothing, a towel or blanket), for 20 minutes every hour or so through the day can help with swelling.

Stage two: gentle movement(3-6 weeks)

Once you're starting to feel a bit more energized after 2-3 weeks, you can start doing some 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.

You can start going for longer walks and handling more tasks around the home but still staying away from high impact and strenuous tasks. Keep lifting to a minimum and **when you have to lift, exhale at the same time that you're lifting.**

Most people are safe to return to sexual activity after 3 weeks but you should listen to the advice from your particular surgeon and medical team.



Upper body stretches

Once your scars have closed, it'll be good to practice some upper body and thorax stretching while keeping your arm below shoulder height if you had a full mastectomy. If you had a chest reduction or keyhole surgery and your surgeon is happy for you to reach overhead, you can move through this stage faster. Always stop the stretch when you start to feel pulling and don't push past pain/ discomfort. Start small like reaching arms up towards shoulder height (moving in front and to the side). You can also practice moving your arms behind your body.

Stage 3: 6 weeks +

Around 6 weeks or when your scar has closed, you should start massaging the area to prevent adhesions with vitamin E or silicone gel.

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. Most people can start strengthening with arms below shoulder height in exercises such as bicep curls, triceps pull down, shoulder external/internal rotation on the cable machine, chest press, triceps push ups etc. Use very light weights to start.

Stage 4: 6 months+

After 6 months post full mastectomy, you want to start moving your arm above shoulder height and it will take some time to gain this range of motion back. A physiotherapist can work with you to improve mobility and strength of your shoulder if you have the ability to reach out to one.



Some ideas to start with include, using the wall to walk your hands up one at a time in front and to the side. You can put both your hands on the wall and walk backwards, bringing your chest towards the floor. Gradually work your way towards reaching overhead and side bending. Try to do some deep breathing while stretching and work on this a few times per day.

Once your range of motion is improving, start with light weights or resistance bands to increase strength overhead and progress slowly as you feel able to. This is where you can **gradually** return to overhead press exercises, lat pull downs, pull ups, Turkish get ups, handstands etc.



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



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.