



FREE GUIDE

Gender Affirming Surgery

VAGINOPLASTY





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 vaginoplasty?

Vaginoplasty is one of the gender affirming pelvic surgery options for people who want both a vulva and a vagina that is capable of receiving penetration. After surgery, there won't be a penis or testicles and the person will instead have a vulva and a vagina. The person will have a clitoris and most people who undergo this procedure can orgasm.

This is a major surgery 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.



How do I prepare for a vaginoplasty

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 two 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. 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

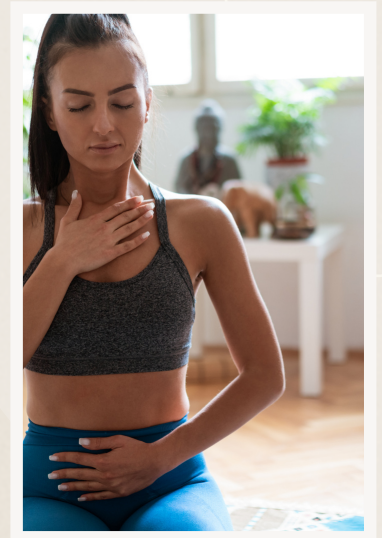




How do I prepare for a vaginoplasty

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.



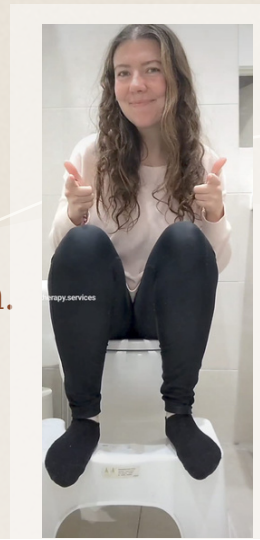
Pelvic Physio Prep

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? Imaging how it feels to dilate. Do this regularly leading up to the vaginoplasty to improve sensation post op.

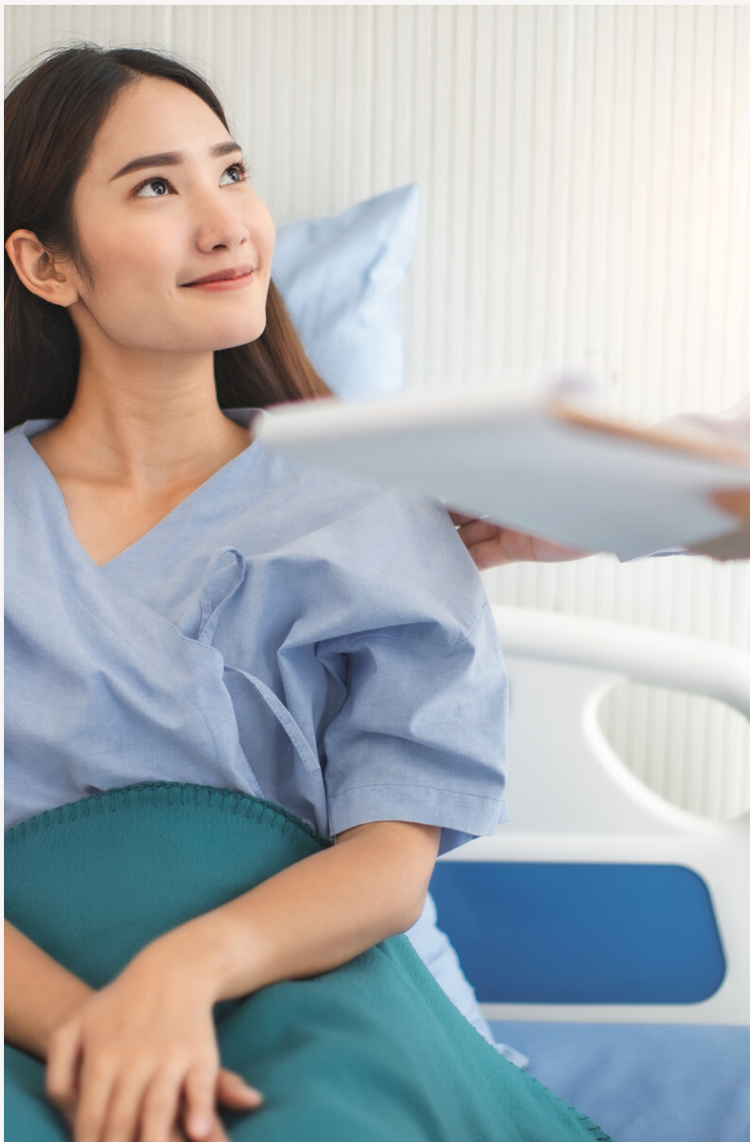
Other considerations

- ☐ 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 vulva.



Your inpatient healthcare team will teach you how to dilate when they remove the dressings from your neovagina. **Deep breathing and pelvic floor lengthening can make dilating easier. Remember what you practiced before your operation and help your pelvic floor lengthen.**

Particularly focus on inhaling deeply as you insert your dilator. Holding your breath will make dilating harder, so try to keep your airway moving.



POST OP VAGINOPLASTY (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 (2 weeks)

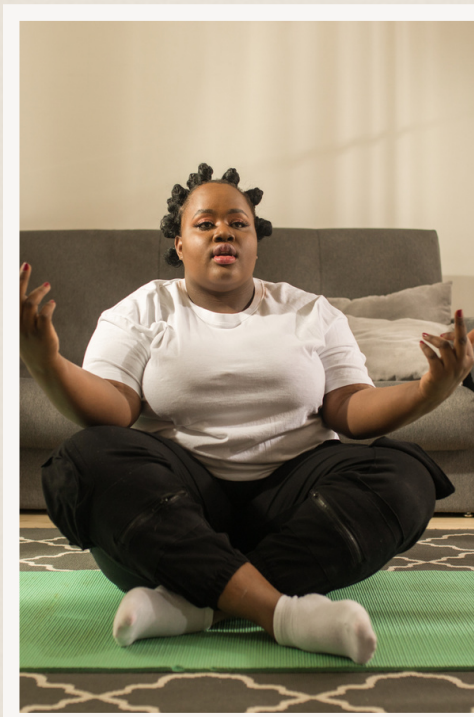
Your body has gone through a major operation and you're going to need time to rest. Follow post op orders about how often to clean your new vagina and any other directions including when to start taking normal medication again.

Follow directions on dilating. Avoid heavy lifting. 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. 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.

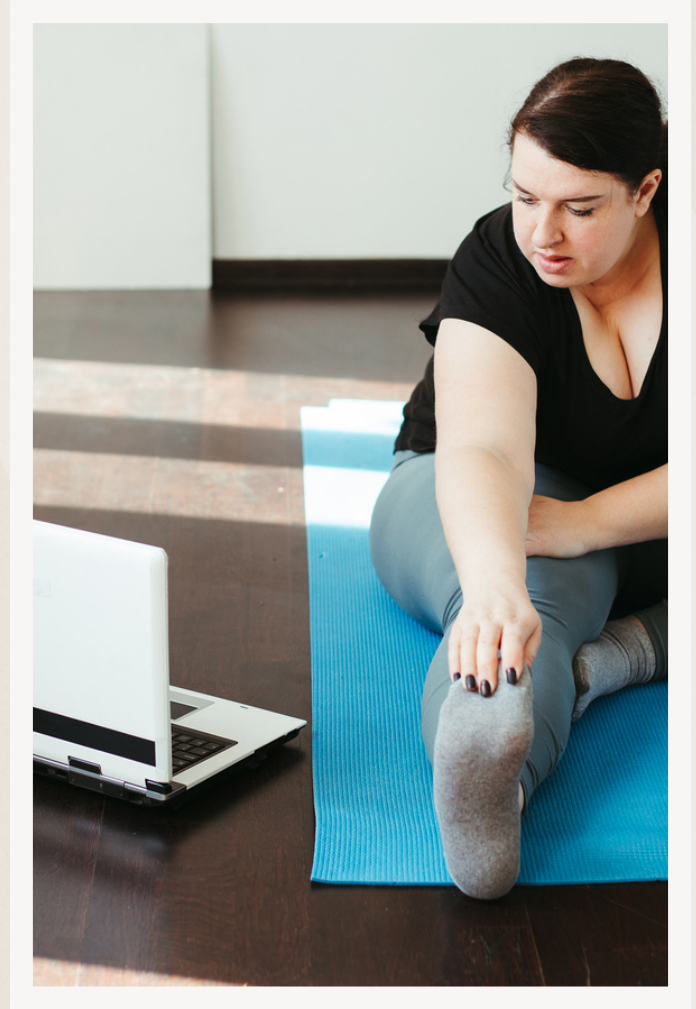
Swelling

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(2-12 weeks)

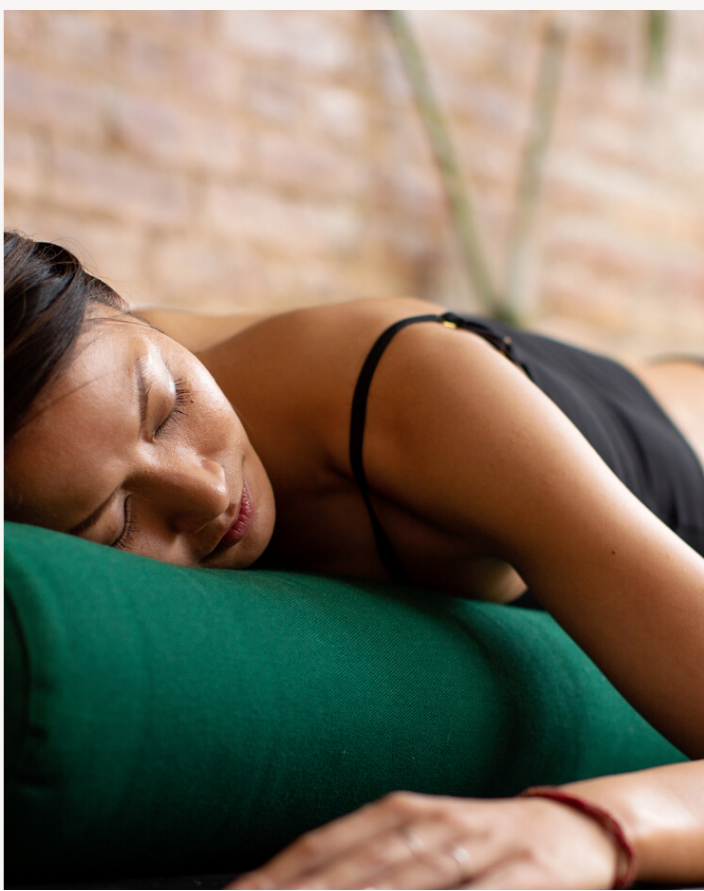
Once you're starting to feel a bit more energized after a week or two, you can start doing some very gentle movements and easy stretches. A physiotherapist can go through specific stretches that suit your recovery if you have the ability to reach out to one.

Practice your pelvic floor lengthening with breathing coordination both during and outside of dilating.



You can start going for longer walks if you can tolerate 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: 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 engage in sex after 3 months (although you may personally choose to wait longer and that is valid). Prior to this, you can use a vibrator for stimulation if it feels good but no oral sex, or penetration of the anus or neovagina.

It's normal to "spray everywhere" when you pee after vaginoplasty. 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.