

June 2024

my workbook for chest construction surgery in BC

A message from the Trans Care BC Team

Dear Reader,

Thanks for picking up this workbook! It was put together by a team of trans folks and allies at Trans Care BC. Many of us have gone through gender-affirming surgeries, and we know it can sometimes feel like a long and confusing journey. We hope this book will be a source of help and comfort along the way.

By ‘chest construction surgery,’ we are referring to the different procedures (including chest reduction) that can be done to remove breast tissue and skin to make a flatter chest. You don’t need to be masculine or male to have this surgery.

Chest construction surgery is publicly funded for trans, Two-Spirit, and non-binary individuals in British Columbia. This workbook contains a summary of how to access this procedure. For more in-depth information, including answers to your Frequently Asked Questions, please visit our website for a [guide on chest construction surgery](#). The workbook you are holding is a companion to this website, with extra worksheets, exercises, and checklists.

This workbook is meant to be a resource for keeping track of information related to your chest construction surgery. Some parts may not apply to you, and there may be some sections you don’t want to fill in. That’s ok! What you do with this workbook is up to you.

A note on privacy and confidentiality: If you enter personal information that you wouldn’t want other people to know, it may be helpful to treat this workbook as you would your travel passport or Care Card.

Please remember this workbook does not replace the information you receive from your surgeon. If there are any differences, you should always follow the advice provided by your surgeon.

Finally, Trans Care BC’s health navigation team is available to help you at any point in this process. To learn more about the health navigation team’s role in supporting people through chest construction surgery, maintaining the central waitlist, and what we do and don’t do, check out our [website](#).

We wish you all the best!

Sincerely,

Health Navigation Team:

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Accessing surgery

CONNECT WITH A PRIMARY CARE PROVIDER

The first step to accessing chest construction surgery is to connect with a doctor (GP) or nurse practitioner (NP). The role of the GP or NP is to support you in accessing the care you need. This includes:

- referring you for a Surgical Readiness Assessment,
- helping you meet surgical requirements, and
- assisting with things you need after surgery.

A surgical readiness assessment can be completed by a clinician who meets the qualifications and competencies outlined in the WPATH Standards of Care (Version 8). Your GP or NP may be able to provide a surgical readiness assessment. If they cannot, ask them to refer you to a surgical readiness assessor. If they don't know one, they can refer you to Trans Care BC to provide an assessment or you can contact the **health navigation team** for more options.

APPOINTMENT INFORMATION

My Doctor or Nurse Practitioner: _____

Appointment Date and Time: _____

Appointment Address: _____

Phone: _____

My Surgical Readiness Assessor: _____

Appointment Date and Time: _____

Appointment Address: _____

Phone: _____

GET A SURGICAL READINESS ASSESSMENT

You will meet with a Qualified Surgical Assessor for a Surgical Readiness Assessment. The Surgical Readiness Assessment confirms that you meet the criteria for chest construction surgery. It also helps ensure you are prepared and supported before, during, and after your surgery.

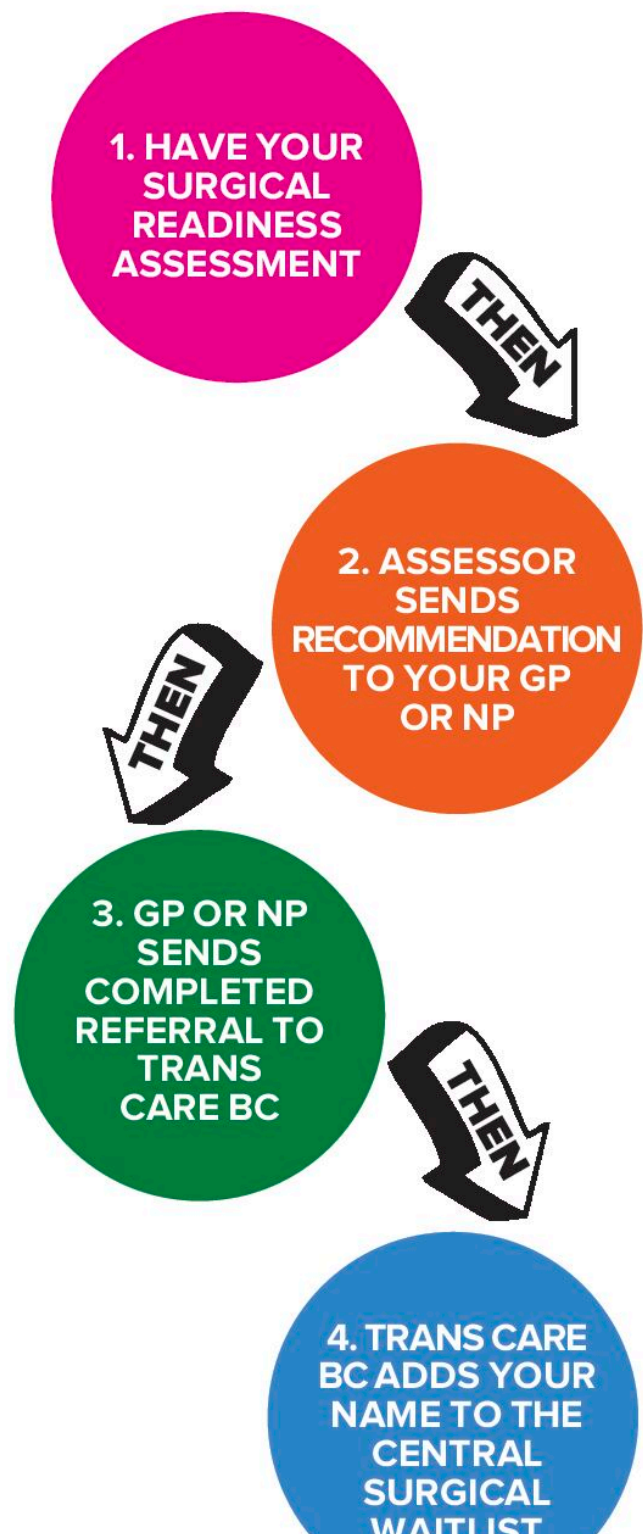
Many people feel anxious about the Surgical Readiness Assessment. They worry about saying the wrong thing and being denied a surgery that is very important to their health and well-being. It may ease your fears to know that these assessments have changed as understandings of gender and human rights have evolved. The focus is on supporting you.

Together, you and the assessor will discuss your gender, your health, your support people, and details about the surgical procedure.

After the appointment, the assessor will write a recommendation for surgery based on the criteria for approval and the information you've shared with them.

If the assessor is not your primary care provider, they will send their recommendation to your GP or NP.

Your GP or NP will send your completed referral to Trans Care BC. Your name will then be added to the central waitlist.



CHOOSE A SURGEON

In BC, chest construction surgeries are provided by several surgeons and you are able to choose your preferred surgeon.

Factors you might consider when choosing your surgeon include:

- Surgeon's wait time
- Surgeon's requirements regarding age, body mass index (BMI) and smoking status
- Surgeon's location and costs associated with out-of-city travel (transportation and lodging are not covered by MSP)



After your completed referral has been sent to the Central Upper Surgery Waitlist at Trans Care BC, a health navigator will contact you to discuss your surgeon options and forward your referral to your chosen surgeon. It may take several months for a health navigator

[illegible]

When your name is next on the central waitlist, Trans Care BC will contact you to talk about your choice of surgeon. Trans Care BC will then send your information to the surgeon of your choice.

The surgeon's office will contact you to book a surgical consult.



HAVE A SURGICAL CONSULT

A surgical consult is an appointment with your surgeon to talk about your goals for surgery and your options in terms of procedures. It's also an opportunity for you to ask questions.

what to expect from this visit:

Each surgeon does things a bit differently, but generally the surgeon will:

- ask questions about your gender, general health, and family history
- ask you to remove your shirt and binder for a physical exam of your chest and underarm area
- use a tape measure to record chest measurements
- take pre-operative photos of your chest
- check blood pressure
- talk about possible surgical outcomes
- give instructions for aftercare, including return to physical activity
- ask you to get bloodwork done before surgery
- depending on age and risk factors, the surgeon may ask for a mammogram or an anesthesia consult
- you might book the date of your surgery, or the surgeon's office will



CURRENT MEDICATIONS

Bring a list of medications, pain medications, traditional medicines, and supplements that you take regularly. Some of these may affect how your body responds during surgery or in the healing period. Your surgeon may recommend changes.

current medications

[illegible]

QUESTIONS FOR THE SURGEON

Your surgeon will cover many topics during your consult. It can be helpful to have a list of topics or questions handy to confirm you cover everything you need to feel prepared for surgery. Don't forget to bring a pen so you can record the answers. You may also want to bring a friend to take notes so you can focus on the conversation. Here are some frequently asked questions (FAQs).



FAQS

What surgical techniques am I a candidate for?

Why do you recommend this particular technique for me?

May I see photos of surgical outcomes for other patients who have had this surgery?

Do I need to take out body, facial, or ear piercings for my surgery?

How long will you require me to stay nearby after surgery?

What are the complications for this surgery?

What are the chances that I might need a revision with this type of surgery?

Why do I need a compression vest after surgery?

Where can I get one? How much will it cost?

How do I take care of my chest and nipples after surgery?

How long will it take to heal?

How should I care for my scars (massage, silicone products)?

I tend to get hypertrophic/keloid scarring. Are there any preventative measures I should know about?

Can I take [medications/vitamins/supplements] before surgery?

When can I shower / return to work / drive a car / exercise, etc.?

NOTES

other questions

Preparing for surgery



please note!

This information does not replace the information you receive from your surgeon. If there are any differences, you should follow the information from your surgeon.

BUY, BORROW, AND DO

CLOTHING & BEDDING

- ☐ Roomy button-down shirts (you won't be able to lift your arms up to put on a t-shirt)
- ☐ Easy-to-slip-on PJs or sweatpants
- ☐ Easy-to-slip-on shoes
- ☐ A bathrobe with pockets (a handy place to put your drains)
- ☐ Two weeks' worth of clean clothes
- ☐ Pillows to keep you comfortable and supported
- ☐ Put fresh sheets on the bed

FOOD & HOME

- ☐ Prepare a week's worth of meals
- ☐ Stock up on groceries
- ☐ Move frequently-used items in your bedroom, kitchen & bathroom, etc. to places that do not require reaching
- ☐ Re-usable straw
- ☐ To avoid infections after surgery, make arrangements so pets will not be near your drains, open wounds, or in your bed until after your drains are removed (approximately two weeks)

PERSONAL CARE (AS NEEDED):

- ☐ Get a hair cut
- ☐ Close shave (but not the surgical site during the day before surgery)
- ☐ Clip finger nails/toe nails/pedicure
- ☐ Get some baby wipes to help feel clean until you can shower again

WORK (IF RELEVANT)

- ☐ Apply for a leave of absence from work
- ☐ Apply for [Medical Employment Insurance](#)

MEDICAL CONSIDERATIONS

- ☐ Any special soaps your surgeon recommended you buy
- ☐ Any bandages your surgeon recommended you buy
- ☐ A good supply of your usual prescriptions
- ☐ Gravol or ginger to help with nausea (optional)
- ☐ Prune juice or stool softeners to help prevent constipation from anathesia and pain medication (optional)
- ☐ Get fitted for and buy the recommended post-op compression vest (Some surgeons sell this vest in their office. It's usually less than \$100. You can ask your healthcare provider to write a letter to MSP to request this medically necessary supply be funded)
- ☐ If you qualify for the First Nations Health Authority's [Health Benefits Program](#), you may be able to recieve coverage for a compression vest
- ☐ Book post-op appointments with your doctor or nurse practitioner (based on your surgeon's recommendations)
- ☐ Consider filling out a Representation Agreement to name someone you trust to make healthcare decisions for you in case you are not able to make them yourself
- ☐ Some providers charge fees for filling out paperwork (ie: for time off work or travel forms). Set aside some money (\$30-\$60) just in case it is needed

EMOTIONAL AND SPIRITUAL CONSIDERATIONS

- ☐ Find meaningful activities you can participate in during the healing process (e.g. mindfulness, spiritual gatherings, meditation, support groups, sharing time with others)
- ☐ Stock up on items you use for ceremonial practices (e.g. smudge or brushing items)
- ☐ Stock up on art supplies (e.g. beading, watercolor paints, sketchbook, etc.)
- ☐ Make appointments for before and after surgery with your counsellor, mentor, elder, or mental health worker, if applicable
- ☐ Consider whether or not you will want pre-op and post-op photos
- ☐ Connect with others who have had this surgery
- ☐ Make a list of things you are looking forward to after surgery
- ☐ Write yourself a letter with words of encouragement for when you feel down
- ☐ If a "good bye" ritual is important to you, consider how you might like to do this. For example, some people take photos, make other kinds of

Arrange help!





important:

After surgery, you will need someone 18 years or older to escort back to your home or accommodations.

You won't be able to drive.

You will also need someone to supervise you for 24 hours following surgery.

Asking for help can take some practice. Here is an activity to help you get started.

- 1 Make a list of everything you need help with after surgery (eg. escort, meal preparation, child care, elder care, dishes, laundry, vacuuming, pet care, social visits, taking out the trash, rides to appointments, etc.).
- 2 Write down the names of people who have offered to help, or who you think would like to help. Don't forget the young people and elders in your life.
- 3 Match people based on their interests, strengths, time, flexibility and how comfortable you are with them.
- 4 Be courageous and ask for help.

DRAW A LINE TO MATCH TASKS TO PEOPLE

i could use some help with...

people i can ask

You can give the handout on the next page to people that are looking

supporting someone having top surgery

WAYS TO HELP BEFORE SURGERY:

- offer rides to and from appointments
- offer to take notes during appointments
- pick up supplies
- help prepare food and groceries that promote wound healing:
 - Protein: meat, nuts, soy**
 - Zinc: whole grains, spinach, nuts**
 - Vitamin A: carrots, broccoli, eggs**
 - Vitamin C: citrus fruits, strawberries, peppers**
- coordinate a schedule to help with meals, chores and visits after surgery (check out websites like MealTrain)
- ask if there are any specific ways you can support them as they get ready for surgery

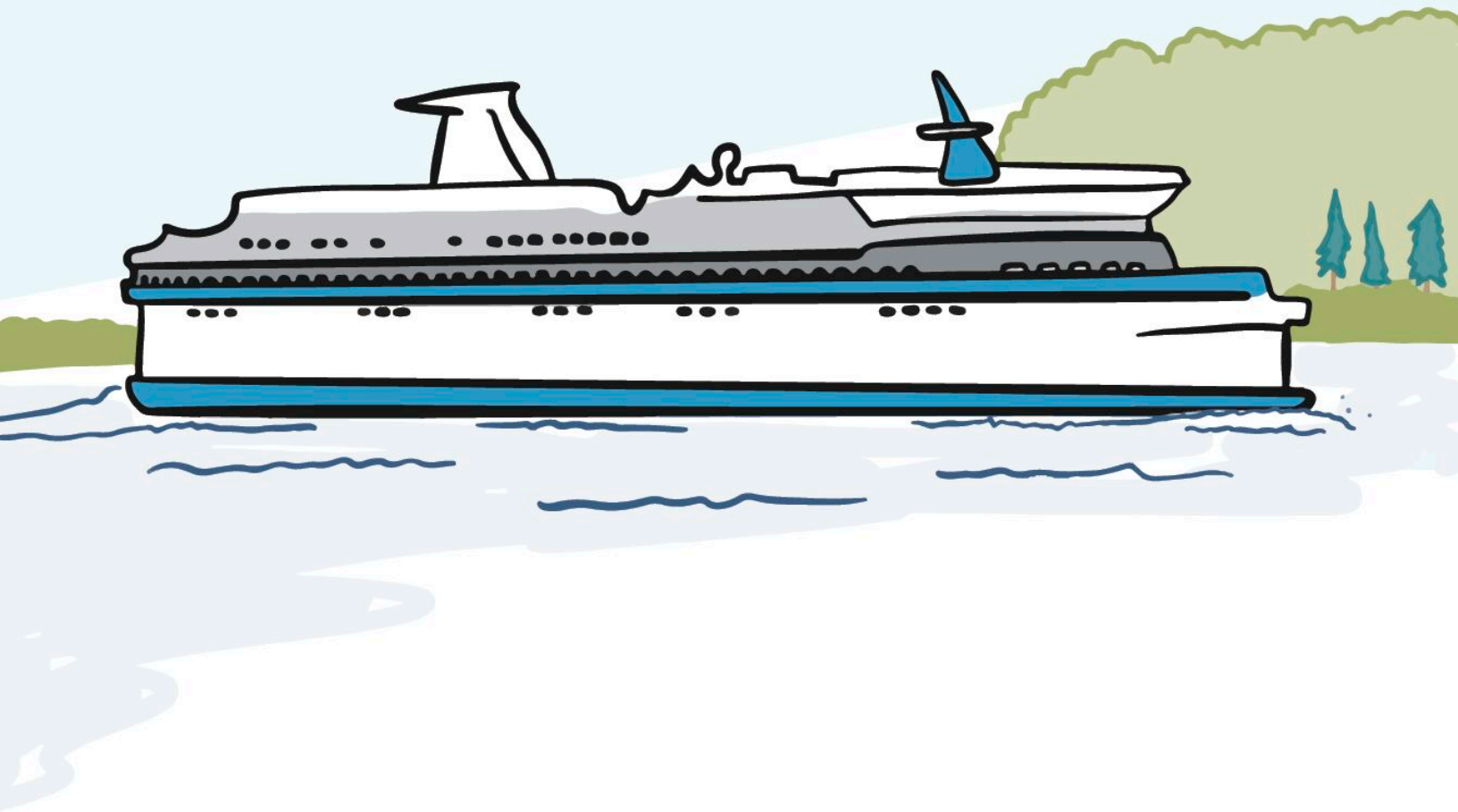
WAYS TO HELP AFTER SURGERY:

- Help with errands (pharmacy, grocery, pet supplies)
- Offer rides to and from appointments, events or spiritual gathering spaces
- Help with household chores:
 - ☐ water plants
 - ☐ walk pets
 - ☐ change litter box
 - ☐ laundry
 - ☐ vacuum
 - ☐ mow or shovel
 - ☐ get groceries
 - ☐ cook or bring a meal
 - ☐ do dishes
 - ☐ clean
 - ☐ change sheets
 - ☐ take out garbage, recycling & compost
- Schedule visits:
 - ☐ watch a movie
 - ☐ have some coffee or tea
 - ☐ go for a car-ride together
 - ☐ make a little picnic
 - ☐ visit a park, botanical or community garden, museum, etc.
 - ☐ play videogames
 - ☐ have a phone or video-chat hangout
 - ☐ play a board game or card game
 - ☐ craft
 - ☐ walk around the block or neighborhood
 - ☐ plan a short visit just to say hello
 - ☐ drop off groceries, a meal or a snack

It can be hard to ask for help, so check-in regularly to see how they are doing and what they need.

- Ask if they need support with childcare or elder care
- Send an encouraging postcard (or email if you live

Make Travel Arrangements





If your surgery is taking place outside your home community, you will need to arrange transportation and accommodations.

TRANSPORTATION

Book your mode of transportation (bus, air, rail, or ferry). If you are travelling by car, you will need someone else to drive you from the surgical centre to your accommodations and later on, back home.

If travel costs are a barrier, you might qualify for the [Travel Assistance Program](#). To access the program:

- ① Ask your doctor or nurse practitioner to fill out a Travel Assistance Program (TAP BC) form.
- ② Two weeks before surgery, call TAP BC to get your confirmation number. Write it on your form.
- ③ Show your form at the time you make air, rail, or ferry reservations.

If you are approved for TAP BC, you may also qualify for Non-Local Medical Transportation Assistance to help with food and accommodation costs. Ask your doctor or nurse practitioner to fill out a Request for Non-Local Medical Transportation Assistance form.

If you qualify for the First Nations Health Authority's Health Benefits Program, you may be able to access [Medical Transportation Benefits](#).

If you are flying, find out if you qualify for [Hope Air](#), a Canadian charity that arranges free flights for low-income Canadians who must fly to get

TRANSPORTATION DETAILS:

To:

To:

Date:

Date:

Time:

Time:

Travel details:

Travel details:

ACCOMMODATIONS

Find out how long your surgeon requires you to stay nearby. Around three days is common. Book your lodgings early to get the best deal. Some hotels provide lower rates for people travelling for medical reasons. You can contact hotels directly or search the Government of BC's [Medical Travel Accommodation Listings](#).

My Accommodations (dates, times, reservation codes, cost, etc.):

NOTES

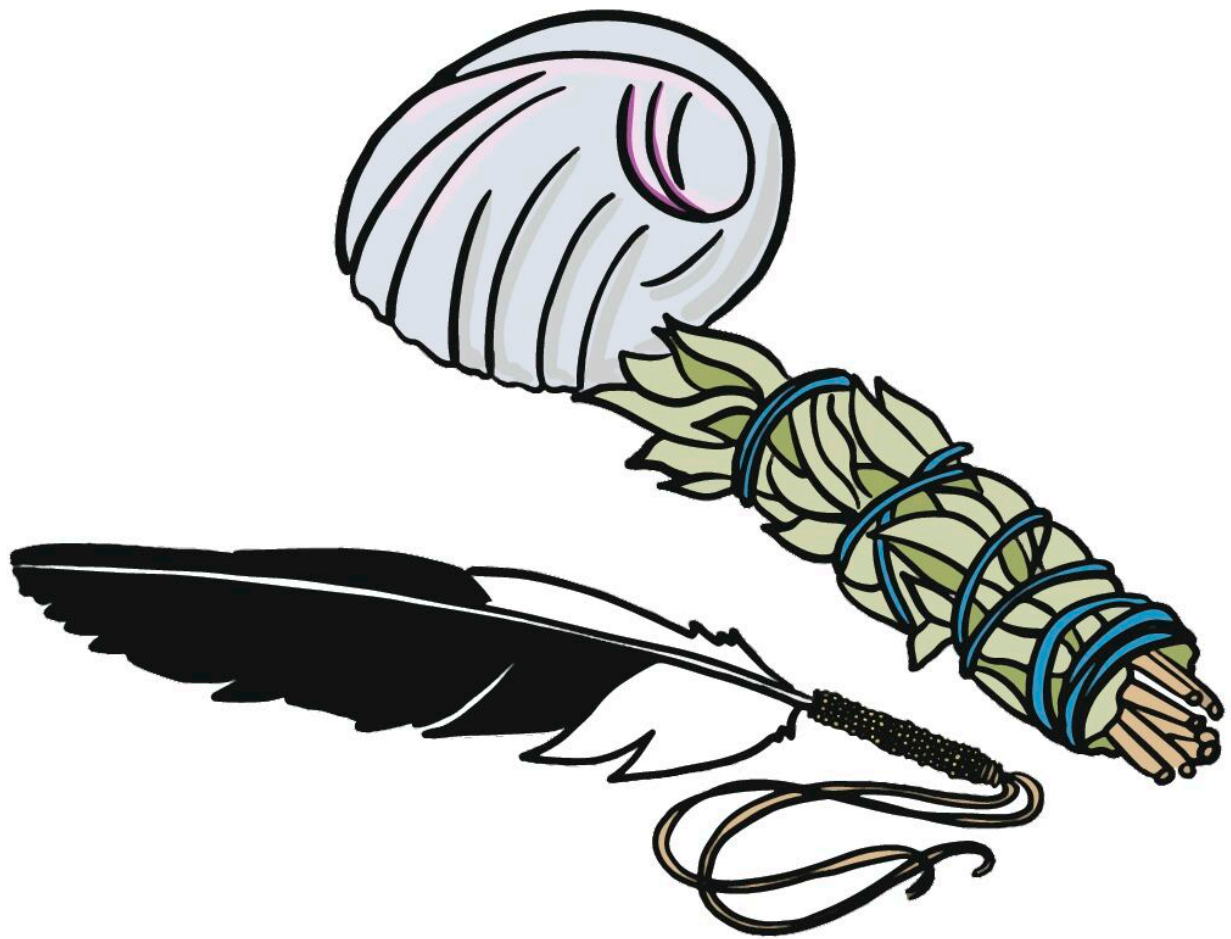
MAKE A SELF-CARE PLAN

staying healthy before surgery

You can reduce complications from surgery by starting the healing process beforehand. Below are some steps you can take before surgery to help your body recover. For most of us, these strategies are easier said than done. Remember that self-care includes doing what is manageable and trying to love ourselves no matter what.

- Enjoy foods that promote wound healing. Look for foods with protein (meats and nuts); zinc (whole grains, spinach, nuts); vitamin A (carrots, broccoli, eggs); & Vitamin C (citrus fruits, strawberries, peppers).
- Do simple and fun exercises to build strength and support your heart and lung health, like dog walking, dancing, hiking, stretching, or weight training.
- Drink enough water to have clear, light yellow-colored urine.
- Make sure you get 7-9 hours of sleep each night. If you have any trouble sleeping, speak with your doctor or nurse practitioner about strategies for better sleeping.





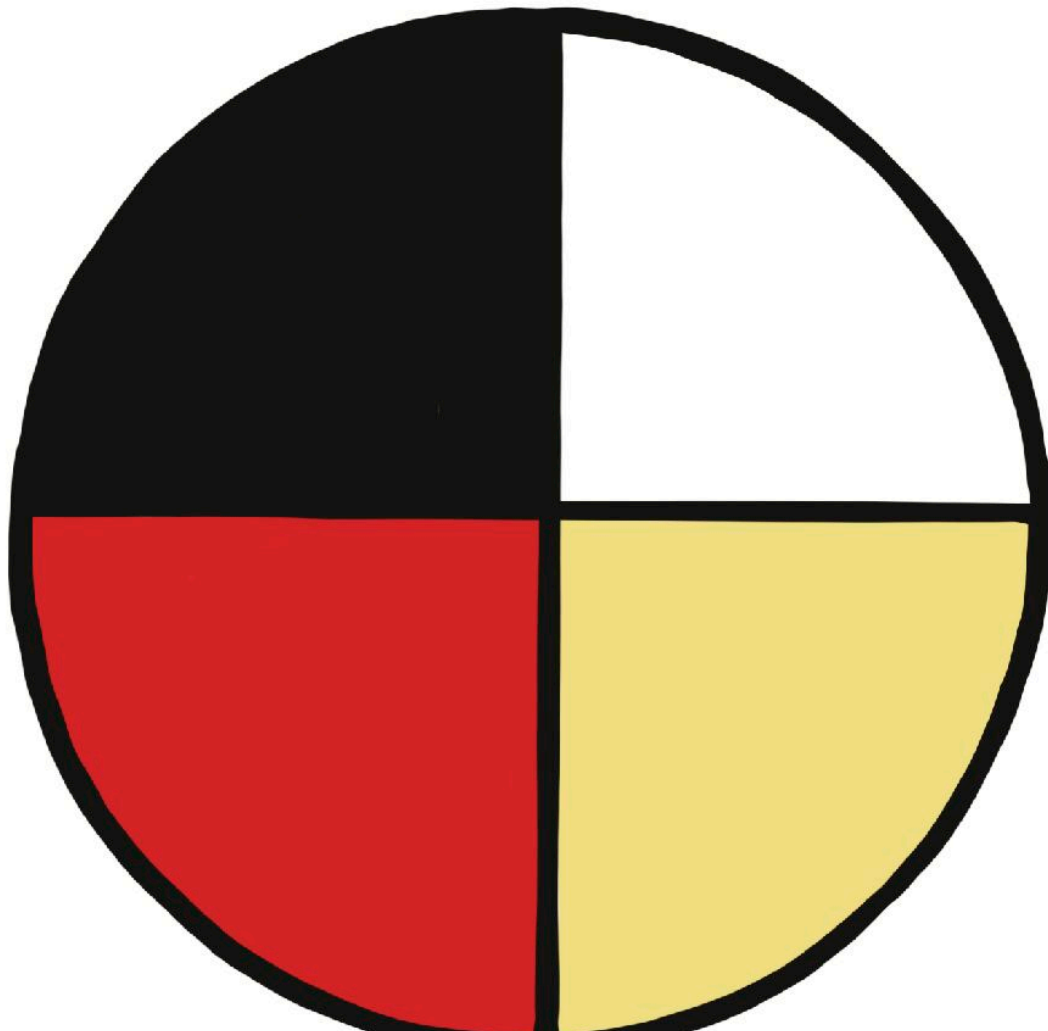
- Quit smoking. We know - it's a big ask. Lung health is an important helper in healing, and smoking cigarettes can disrupt the healing process. This is why surgeons and healthcare providers recommend avoiding cigarettes before and after surgery. Smoking cessation supplies are provided at no-cost to people with MSP at any pharmacy in BC. If avoiding smoking for 2-3 months will be hard for you, call Trans Care BC for more information about your options.
- If you smoke marijuana and going 2-3 months without it will be hard for you, consider switching to edibles, concentrates, or tinctures.
- Other substances like methamphetamines, cocaine, heroin and alcohol also disrupt the healing process. It is recommended to avoid these substances before and after surgery. If you need help with this, your healthcare provider can help you make a plan.
- The use of substances may also require more bloodwork in some health authorities, to assess the safety of administering anesthesia.

A SELF-CARE ACTIVITY

You may find this activity helpful for reflecting on your current self-care practices, and planning ways to adapt or create practices that prepare you for surgery and the healing period that follows.

Dating back thousands of years, many First Nations and Native American nations developed and use Medicine Wheels to draw attention to the importance of nurturing and balancing our physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being, throughout our life journey.

On the next few pages, we've outlined these four elements of wellness for you to reflect upon, in order to support your preparation for surgery, and the healing period that follows. Feel free to choose shapes and categories that work for you. Instead of the squares we provide, you may want to use the medicine wheel, a tree, a rainbow, or use categories related to your environment, finances, or job.



self-care: before surgery

Use the boxes on the next page to write down self-care activities that you can do while you prepare for surgery. Here is an example of what could be in your boxes:

social

- Make a big dinner with my friends every Wednesday
- Do crafts, like zines, art projects, etc.
- Go to the movies

spiritual

- Visit temple
- Journal
- Attend sweats
- Write myself encouraging notes to read after surgery
- Meditate while sitting

Emotional

- Clean my house Friday night
- Go to counselling
- Play guitar

Physical

- Have a hot bath
- Swim
- Hike
- Have a massage

self-care: before surgery

social

emotional

spiritual

physical

self-care: after surgery

Use the boxes on the next page to write down self-care activities that you can do while you are healing from surgery. Be sure to keep activity restrictions in mind. Here is an example of what could be in your boxes:

social

- Book social visits in advance
- Go for a picnic
- Go out for tea/meals with friends
- Do crafts, like zines, art projects, etc.
- Watch movies with friends
- Phone & video chat hangouts

Emotional

- Go to counselling
- Read notes I wrote to myself before surgery
- Listen to music, look at art, light candles
- Lie outside & watch clouds
- Ask for help with chores & errands

spiritual

- Visit temple (someone drives me)
- Journal
- Speak with elders
- Smudge
- Sit quietly in nature
- Meditate while reclining or lying down

Physical

- Use a hot cloth on my face, neck and shoulders
- Eat meals I made in advance
- Go for a walk every day
- Diffuse essential oils

self-care: after surgery

social

emotional

spiritual

physical

on the day of your surgery

Below is a description of what generally happens on the day of surgery. Each surgical center is different, so your experience may vary.

- 1 Follow the instructions from your surgeon for when to stop eating and drinking.
- 2 Follow the instructions from your surgeon about bathing your chest.
- 3 Arrive at the surgical centre and check in.
- 4 You'll get a wristband with the same name and gender found on your BC Services Card. If this is different from the name you use and your gender, you can ask for an extra "Name Alert" wristband with your correct name and pronouns. You can also ask for this information to be put on the front of your chart.
- 5 Spend some time in the waiting room until you are called.
- 6 You will either be taken to a room or a curtained area with a hospital bed. There may be a chair for someone to sit with you (or you can ask for one).
- 7 A nurse will talk with you about what to expect. You'll be given a hospital shirt to change into and a basket to hold all of your clothing, including undergarments. The nurse will remind you to remove your jewelry. You can ask the nurse any questions you have.
- 8 The nurse will check your blood pressure and may give you some pills or start an IV.
- 9 The surgeon will make some drawings on your chest to guide to the procedure.
- 10 The anesthesiologist may visit you to talk about the anesthetic and answer questions.

11 You will be taken to the Operating Room.

12 The nurses will help you onto the surgical table and put on a blood pressure cuff and some monitors. The surgeon may ask you to confirm the name of the procedure you are receiving. The anesthesiologist will talk you through going under anesthesia.

13 Once the anesthesia has made you fall asleep, the surgeon will begin the procedure.

14 When the surgery is over, you will be taken to a recovery area. Nurses will monitor you closely until the anesthesia wears off. They will help you get out of bed, walk around, and go to the washroom. They can also call your supports at that time with an update.

15 You will likely be discharged from the hospital the same day. Before you leave, the nurse will give you papers containing your Discharge Instructions and maybe a prescription.



Post-surgical care

**It is important to follow your
surgeon's instructions for aftercare.**

The information here does not replace
the information you receive from your
surgeon. If there are any differences,
you should follow your surgeon's
instructions.



1. Monitor your surgical site

SIGNS OF COMPLICATIONS

Call your surgeon, doctor, or nurse practitioner if you experience:

- Excessive wound redness
- Excessive bruising or swelling
- Excessive yellow or green pus-like drainage
- The area around the incision is hot or hard and painful to the touch
- Chills or a fever over 38.5 degrees Celsius (101.3 Fahrenheit) by mouth
- Pain that is not relieved by prescribed medications or gets worse a few days after surgery , If necessary, go to the Emergency Room.

BRUISING AND SWELLING

It is normal to have bruising and swelling after surgery. You may have more swelling on one side than the other, and it can change throughout the day. It will go down gradually, taking up to 6 months to resolve.

CHANGES IN SENSATION

It is common to have less sensation or numbness in the nipples, areola and chest area. It can take 6-12 months for the nerve endings to heal or grow back into these areas. Once in awhile, you might even feel prickly or stinging sensations as the nerves heal and grow. There can be permanent changes to sensation, including areas of complete numbness.

ITCHINESS

Recovering from top surgery can involve some itchiness. Itchiness is caused by the reduction of swelling. It can also be caused by your compression garment or an allergic reaction to the adhesive in your bandages. If it's accompanied by swelling and redness, itchiness can be a sign of infection. Ask with your healthcare provider how to manage this side-effect.

INCISIONS AND SCARS

It is normal to have redness along the incision and sutures that can be seen or felt. Surgeons will often recommend that you avoid getting direct sun on your scars and nipples for up to a year, to help prevent

2. Take good care of your body

GET LOTS OF REST

Plan to do less activity during the day and allow yourself to nap. Your body needs extra sleep while you are healing. Relaxation techniques can help your body heal from surgery, too. They reduce the effects of stress on your body, letting your body's systems focus on the healing process.

LIMIT ARM MOVEMENT

Do your best to limit your arm movements. Some people find it helpful to imagine they are a T-Rex. A T-Rex has short little arms that cannot reach far forward or be raised above the shoulders. To be like a T-Rex, keep your elbows at your sides. Avoid using your arms to stand up, sit down, or get in and out of bed. You should also avoid lifting objects over 10 pounds. This will prevent pulling on sutures and stretching your scars.



WEAR YOUR COMPRESSION VEST

You will come out of surgery wearing a compression vest to help reduce swelling. It may feel uncomfortable over time, but it is very important to continue to wear the vest as directed by your surgeon. If you have problems or concerns related to the vest, contact your healthcare provider.



MANAGE CONSTIPATION

Constipation is a common side-effect of pain medication. If you experience this, try increasing the number of walks you take, drinking more water, eating more fruits and vegetables, eating prunes, or taking a stool softener. Get protein from food sources other than dairy. If constipation continues for several days, call your healthcare provider.

MANAGE NAUSEA

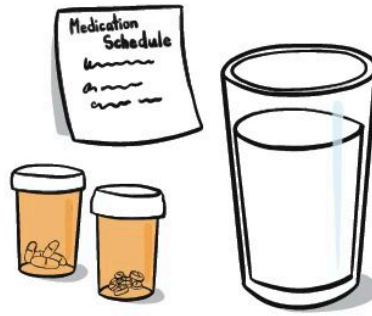
Experiencing some nausea and vomiting after surgery can be normal. You can try taking Gravol or ginger. If it persists for several days, call your healthcare provider.

MANAGE PAIN

It is normal to experience a moderate amount of pain during the first few days after your surgery. Take your pain meds on time to keep your pain under control, manage stress, promote healing and decrease complications.



Track your pain and medications



Below is a table to help you plan out when to take your pain (and other) medications. You can also print medication tracking sheets online. Some people find it helpful to organize their medications in a pill organizer or dosette.

date:

| Medication | Dosage | Morning | Noon | Evening | Bedtime |
|------------|--------|---------|------|---------|---------|
| | | | | | |

EMPTY YOUR DRAINS

It is common to have surgical drains inserted during chest construction surgery. A surgical drain is a tube placed at the surgical site to allow fluid (like blood) to leave your body. The fluid collects in a plastic pouch. You will be taught to regularly empty your drains into a small measuring cup and record the amount of fluid each time. This record will help your healthcare providers decide when the drains can come out. Once the flow slows or stops, your surgeon, doctor, or nurse practitioner will remove the drains. The amount of time drains are needed varies from person to person. **Use the chart below to record the amount of fluid.**

| Day | Right drain | Left drain |
|-------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Day 1 | morning night total | morning night total |
| Day 2 | morning night total | morning night total |
| Day 3 | morning night total | morning night total |
| Day 4 | morning night total | morning night total |
| Day 5 | morning night total | morning night total |
| Day 6 | morning night total | morning night total |
| Day 7 | morning night | morning night |

Move to Promote Healing

Go for little walks after your surgery. Walking increases your blood flow, which speeds up the healing process. If walking is not an option for you, or if you are lying down for long periods of time, leg exercises and breathing exercises will also increase your blood flow and support your healing.

LEG EXERCISES

- 1 Keeping the heels of your feet on the bed, point your toes down toward the end of the bed.
- 2 Return to a normal resting position.
- 3 Point your toes back towards your chin.
- 4 Return to a normal resting position.
- 5 Keeping the heels of your feet on the bed, point your toes and move them in a big circle to rotate your ankles. Move your toes clockwise a few times, then counter clockwise a few times.
- 6 Rest for a short time.
- 7 Repeat steps 1 to 6 four more times.

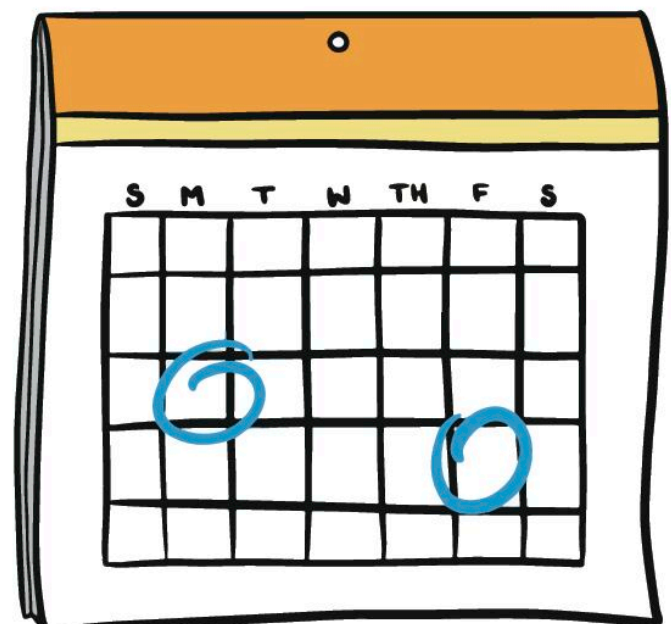


DEEP BREATHING EXERCISES

- 1 Sit or lay comfortably & rest your hands on your abdomen.
- 2 Take a deep breath in through your nose: imagine filling the bottom of your lungs first, then the middle, then the top. You might feel your lungs expand.
- 3 Hold your breath while you say in your head, “This will help my body heal” or any meaningful word, phrase or sound.
- 4 Blow the air out completely, including pushing the last bit of air out from the bottom of your lungs. Pursing your lips can help you control your breath.
- 5 Repeat 3 times.
- 6 Take a little rest.
- 7 Repeat steps 1-5 another four times (16 breaths total).

Attend your check-ups

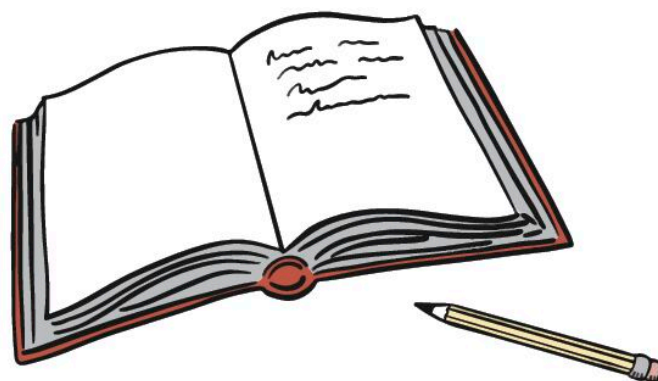
You will make a plan with your surgeon for check-ups after surgery. Your health care providers will make sure your incisions are healing well. They may ask about pain, bleeding, bowel movements, fever, and how you are feeling physically and emotionally.



3. Beat the Post-surgery Blues

The after-effects of medications, surgery and the activity limitations required during recovery can lead to something called 'post-operative blues.' This can include feelings of low mood, loss of appetite, difficulty concentrating and even self-doubt. This is a temporary and normal part of the healing period. Here are some suggestions for making it easier.

- ▽ Put your self-care plan from page 31 into action
- ▽ Make lists of things you love and reflect on how you can experience more of what you love while you heal from surgery (eg. lists of activities that bring you joy, ways that you connect with others, ways that you show yourself love, foods you love to eat, smells that calm & refresh you, sounds that inspire you, textures that you love to feel on your skin)
- ▽ Write letters expressing thanks to people who helped you during surgery
- ▽ Keep a journal



4. Mindfully return to usual activities

Follow your surgeon's advice about when you can resume your usual activities, such as:

- | | | | |
|---|--------------------------|---|--------------------------|
| ▽ | Taking a bath or shower | ▽ | Lifting more than 10 lbs |
| ▽ | Going to work | ▽ | Exercising |
| ▽ | Driving a car | ▽ | Sex |
| ▽ | Swimming | ▽ | Rituals and ceremonies |
| ▽ | Participating in a sweat | ▽ | Dancing |
| ▽ | Having a sauna | ▽ | Sunbathing |
| ▽ | Playing instruments | | |



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