

What to Expect: Vaginoplasty at Michigan Medicine

Department of Surgery



MICHIGAN MEDICINE
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

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What should I expect during my vaginoplasty consultation appointment?

The following information explains what you can expect on the day of your vaginoplasty consultation appointment.

- Arrive at Plastic Surgery **15 minutes prior to your scheduled appointment time**. Before the appointment, you will have forms to fill out in the waiting room, and the check-in staff will make a copy of your insurance card, if you will be using insurance to pay any part of the cost.

During your appointment you will be seen by a team that will include medical students, physician's assistants, nurses, and Plastic Surgery Residents.

- You will, of course, also see the attending Plastic Surgeon who leads the team and who will coordinate all of your care.
- Your consultation will include your medical history and a physical examination to determine whether or not you are a good candidate for gender confirmation surgery.
- Your consultation team will discuss all relevant information with you about the proposed surgery, and you will be able to ask any questions you may have.

What happens after my consultation appointment?

If your consultation team determines that you are a good candidate for surgery, you will then meet with the surgery scheduler and other staff. They will provide you with information about what to expect, and what will be expected of you as you prepare for the surgery.

- They may request that you get medical tests prior to being scheduled for surgery.
- If you have not had your hair removed at the surgical site, they will discuss this with you as well.

In addition to these medical and surgical requirements, the scheduler will begin the process of requesting pre-authorization from your insurance company (to determine if your surgical procedure is covered by your insurance plan).

- **You will receive the surgical package price fees and associated forms for review and signature, in the event that insurance denies the pre-authorization request for surgery.**

When will I receive my surgery date?

You will not be scheduled for a surgery date during the consultation appointment. You will receive the exact date of your surgery about 2-3 months ahead of time. You can generally expect a surgery date 9 to 12 months after the consultation appointment.

- If your hair removal at the surgical site is already complete when you come to the consultation appointment, then it will still take about 6- 8 weeks after the appointment for your pre-authorization for insurance payment to be processed.
- After the consultation appointment, completion of hair removal at the surgical site, and the approximate 6 to 8 weeks that it takes for the insurance pre-authorization, you will be placed on a wait list for surgery. **Please note that the estimated wait time for surgery varies, depending on surgeon availability.**
- Rather than scheduling surgery dates very far in advance, which then might need to be changed, we don't book your surgery until the surgeon's schedule is finalized. This means that you will usually be notified of your surgery date about 2 to 3 months before the date of your surgery.

How can I prepare for my gender confirmation surgery and plan for my recovery period?

The following information has been prepared to help you prepare for and recuperate from your gender confirmation surgery. Some patients report that the preparations are rather exhausting. We suggest you complete your work and personal business prior to the day before surgery. On the day before your surgery you will need to focus on your bowel preparation, and pack.

What medications should I stop taking?

- **You will discontinue hormone therapy three weeks before surgery.**
- Once you receive your surgical date, you should contact your prescribing physician to review all of your medications. Do not alter your hormone therapy regimen until directed by your physician.
- Some medications interfere with blood's ability to clot. **One week before surgery, through one week after surgery, do not take:**
 - Aspirin
 - Ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil)
 - Naproxen (Aleve, Naprosyn)
 - Vitamin E
 - Multivitamins (because they contain Vitamin E)
 - herbal preparations (fish oil, garlic, ginkgo, etc.)
- If you take any of these medications by prescription, you will need to contact your prescribing physician and get permission to stop the medication as directed above.

Do I have to stop smoking?

Yes. Smoking and nicotine both interfere with the blood vessels' ability to deliver oxygenated blood to the surgical site. This may result in delayed healing or loss of tissue. The number of wound complications is many times higher for smokers than it is for non-smokers. For this reason, we do not perform this

surgery on active smokers or those consuming nicotine products.

- Plastic Surgery will not schedule a consultation appointment with you until you have been smoke-free and nicotine-free for **at least 2 months**.
 - This restriction applies to **all** nicotine products and to smoking and vaping marijuana.
 - You **may** use forms of marijuana that are **not** smoked, vaped, or breathed in (for example: edibles, pills/tablets, patches).
- We will order a test (urine cotinine) after your consultation to confirm you have stopped using all nicotine products. You have to be nicotine-free at least 4 weeks before the test in order to have negative results.
- If your results for the urine cotinine test are **positive**, we will **not** request insurance pre-authorization and we will **not** put you on a surgery waitlist.
- We recommend that you not resume smoking or using nicotine products. However, if you want to resume after surgery, we insist you refrain from smoking or using nicotine products for **at least 4 weeks after surgery**.

How do I prepare for the recovery period?

When you plan your leave from work, it would be wise to allow **six to eight weeks for your recovery**. This time is needed to allow the tissue to heal and for you to regain your strength. Each person's recovery period varies. Ask your employer for some flexibility in returning to work.

What supplies do I need to prepare in advance?

Your recovery period is one that needs to be as hassle free as possible.

Therefore, it would be wise to prepare the following in advance:

- Buy six packages of maxi pads and one package of pads designed for night-time use at home.
- A lubricant will be necessary as you begin vaginal rinses.
- We also recommend several bottles of KY gel, which is a water soluble

product that lubricates the catheter you use to do the vaginal rinses. This makes it easier to advance the catheter into the neo-vagina.

- Your **nutritional needs** will be extremely important for a successful recovery.
 1. Plan to prepare and freeze meals.
 2. Stock up on foods that are easily prepared.
 3. Arrange for friends to assist you or collect menus from local restaurants that will deliver.

When will I be able to drive?

It will be helpful to have friends and family available to do errands for you for a couple of weeks. **You will not be driving for several weeks after surgery.** You will need to make arrangements to have someone drive you to and from your appointments with the surgeon

How do I prepare for the hospital and discharge?

What do I need to bring to the hospital?

When you pack for the hospital, think light!

- Include your personal hygiene items, a light robe and slippers.
- You do not need pajamas or night gowns.
- Hospital gowns will be the most appropriate garment while inpatient.
- Plan to wear the same outfit to and from the hospital. It should be items that are loose fitting (especially if you decide to wear pants).
- Bring something to occupy your time, such as books, magazines, an iPod, etc. You will be in your bed or room for several days.

1 day before surgery:

The day before your surgery, you will need to take the day off work.

- On this day, you will complete your bowel cleansing preparation (prescribed by the surgeon at your pre-operative visit).
- This preparation will cause you to have multiple and sometimes powerful bowel movements. The desired outcome is that you are having bowel movements that do not contain stool.
- We recommend that this morning you eat a hearty breakfast. This will be your last solid food for several days. For the remainder of this day, you will have only clear liquids.
- Drink extra water and rest in between visits to the bathroom. If you start the preparation around noon, you should be done and ready for bed at your usual time.
- Plan to wear a hairdo to the hospital that will be able to withstand not being washed for several days, and that will be comfortable while you are lying on your back. The morning of surgery, you will remove all hair decorations (pins, clips, etc.). You will remove make-up and jewelry.

What should I expect while I am in the hospital?

Plan to arrive at the Admitting Department approximately **two hours before your actual surgery**. (Consult the time tables on page 13 – there is a time table for people living less than 150 miles away from the hospital, and a time table for people who live more than 150 miles away.)

1. You will change into a hospital gown, foot warmers and hair cap. At this time an IV will be started through which you will receive fluids and medication.
2. The anesthesiologist responsible for your sedation will check on you. The surgeon and/or the Plastic Surgery resident will also check in with you.
3. When everything is in order, you will be given a sedative in your IV. It is at this time that you will be taken back to the surgical suite.

How long does the surgery last?

Surgery generally lasts six hours. When you awaken, you will be in the Recovery Room.

- You will have on an oxygen mask, an IV, a urinary catheter, two surgical drains and vaginal packing.
- You will have pressure stockings on that help prevent blood clots.
- Recovery room nurses will begin to monitor and medicate you for pain almost immediately.
- Before you are discharged to your room, they will set up and instruct you on the use of the PCA (patient controlled analgesia) pump. This is a method of self-administering pain medication through your IV.

When you are fully awake (usually about two hours after surgery) you will be transferred to a patient room.

- You will have an IV, PCA Pump, urinary catheter, surgical drains and vaginal packing.
- You will be up and around after surgery with the assistance of your nurse.

Your activity will be limited to your room and short walks in the hall.

- The first day after surgery, you can expect to be able to take a few steps inside your hospital room and sit in a **very well-padded** chair for short periods of time (example: for your meals).
- Your diet will be slowly increased. The decision to increase your diet is based on the passage of gas through your rectum and increased bowel sounds.

The morning of the fifth day after surgery is a busy one.

1. The surgeon will remove the urinary catheter, vaginal packing and surgical drains. They will do a vaginal speculum examination.
2. We will then instruct you to start vaginal rinses. You will receive the approval to shower before your discharge. Staff will closely monitor you to ensure you are able to pass urine after removal of the catheter.

When will I be discharged from the hospital?

- **If you have no complications, you will be discharged on the morning of the 6th day after surgery.** That same day you will go to the Plastic Surgery Outpatient Clinic at Domino's Farms where you had your initial consultation.
- We will examine you and teach you the regimen of vaginal dilation so you can begin dilation, and continue with dilation from that day onward.
- You will receive written instructions regarding medication, names of people to contact with questions, and the dates of your post-operative appointments.

What can I expect upon returning home?

Your thoughtful preparation for your recovery period will certainly benefit you at this critical time in your recovery.

- Quiet days with naps and regular bedtimes may be helpful when you return home.
- Having someone stay with you to assist in your care is necessary. Once you are discharged from the hospital, **for 1 week you will need to have someone with you (except for very short intervals) 24 hours a day.**
- In addition to resting, you will be busy performing your personal care, including vaginal rinses and vaginal dilation at regular intervals.
- You will perform dilation twice a day during your entire recovery period (6-8 weeks). The frequency of dilation will change after your recovery period but you will have to perform it indefinitely.
- You will need to sit on a **very well-padded** surface for 4-6 weeks after surgery.
- You will gradually be allowed to increase your walking and sitting restrictions as your body heals.
- You may not lift more than 5-10 pounds for approximately 6 weeks after surgery.

Doctor's Appointments

- During the early weeks of recovery, you will be making several visits to the surgeon's office. Since you will not be driving, you will need to make arrangement with others for your safe transportation.
- Your surgeon will be examining your surgical site and the healing process.
- They will be guiding your personal care and advising you on increasing your activity. You can assist in this process by carefully following instructions and providing clear information regarding your recovery.
- As your wound heals and your strength returns, you will discuss your return to work with your surgeon. Your surgeon will supply documentation for your employer regarding your return to work.

Surgery timeframe: Patients traveling 150 miles or less to Ann Arbor

The following timetable includes the minimum required times for optimal healing, and only if there are no complications.

1. You must come to Ann Arbor to attend your H & P (History and Physical) examination at the surgeon's office. This will be scheduled for about 1 month prior to surgery.
2. Before the week of surgery, you will need to gather all of the items on page 6 in the "What supplies do I need to prepare in advance?" section so that when you are discharged from the hospital, you will have these items available.
3. Next, you will need to begin the bowel cleansing preparation, around noon on Monday, the day before surgery.
4. As explained above (page 9) in the 'What to Expect in the Hospital' section, you will need to arrive at the hospital two hours prior to your surgery on Tuesday. The operation will be performed that day.
5. You will be in the hospital - inpatient - for 6 days after the surgery.
6. On the 6th day after surgery, the following Monday, **if there are no complications** you will be discharged from the hospital. Beginning with discharge and **for 1 week, you will need to have someone with you (except for very short intervals) 24 hours a day.**
7. The same day as you are discharged from the hospital (the 6th day after surgery) you will travel to the surgeon's clinic for an examination, and to begin dilating, before travelling home.
8. One week later (the 13th day after surgery) on Monday, there will be another examination at the surgeon's office.
9. At this point (the 13th day after surgery) **if everything looks all right to the surgeon and there are no complications**, you will no longer need to have someone staying with you. It is important to understand that you will still not be able to sit for long periods of time and will still not be able to drive.
10. Your last follow up visit to your surgeon will be 6 to 8 weeks after surgery.

Any complications can prolong this timetable.

Surgery timeframe: Patients traveling over 150 miles to Ann Arbor

The following timetable includes the minimum required times for optimal healing, and only if there are no complications.

1. You must arrive in Ann Arbor by the Thursday evening or Friday morning prior to the surgery date, as you will need to attend your H & P (History and Physical) examination at the surgeon's office on Friday.
2. You will then need to gather all of the items on page 6 in the "What supplies do I need to prepare in advance?" section so that when you are discharged from the hospital, you will have these items available in your hotel room.
3. Next, you will need to begin the bowel cleansing preparation around noon on Monday, the day before surgery.
4. As explained above (page 9) 'What to Expect in the Hospital' section, you will need to arrive at the hospital two hours prior to your surgery on Tuesday. The operation will be performed that day.
5. You will be in the hospital - inpatient - for 6 days after the surgery.
6. On the 6th day after surgery, the following Monday, **if there are no complications** you will be discharged from the hospital. Beginning with discharge and **for 1 week, you will need to have someone with you (except for very short intervals) 24 hours a day.**
7. The same day as you are discharged from the hospital (the 6th day after surgery) you will travel to the surgeon's clinic for an examination, and to begin dilating.
8. One week later (the 13th day after surgery) on Monday, there will be another examination at the surgeon's office. **Under no circumstances will you be able to return home prior to this day.**
9. At this point (the 13th day after surgery) **if everything looks all right to the surgeon and there are no complications**, you may plan to return home, understanding that you will need to return for your last follow up visit 4 to

6 weeks after that. You can return home by car or plane, but the total time for your trip home should be 8 hours or less. It is important to understand that you will not yet be able to sit for long periods of time. **It is strongly recommended that people coming from a great distance stay in Ann Arbor longer.**

10. Your last follow up visit to your surgeon will occur 6 to 8 weeks after surgery. **Any complications can prolong this timetable.**

Making Travel Arrangements

For your travel and lodging in Michigan, both for the consultation and for surgery, two departments here at Michigan Medicine (below) can assist you with making arrangements. Please know that a patient must pay for their travel expenses out of pocket. Neither insurance nor Michigan Medicine covers travel and lodging expenses.

Patient and Visitor Accommodations Program

This program can assist you in making arrangements for lodging here in Ann Arbor, and with getting a shuttle to and from the airport. Some local hotels and motels have local shuttle service included.

- Hours: Mon. – Fri.: 9:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. EST
- Phone: (734) 936-0135
- Toll free: (800) 544-8684

Guest Assistance Program

This program can assist you with coordinating needs that arise during medical treatment.

- Hours: Mon. – Fri.: 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.
- Phone: (734) 764-6893
- Toll free: (800) 888-9825

Who do I call if I have questions?

- If you have **medical questions**, please bring them to the surgeon at your consultation appointment.
- If you have **scheduling questions**, please contact the Plastic Surgery schedulers at (734) 998-6022.
- If you have a **non-medical, non-scheduling question** (travel, hair removal, etc.), please contact the Comprehensive Gender Services staff at (734) 998-2150.

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