

# **What to Expect: Mastectomy and Chest Reconstruction at Michigan Medicine**

**Department of Surgery**



**MICHIGAN MEDICINE**  
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

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## **What should I expect during my mastectomy/chest reconstruction consultation appointment?**

The following information explains what you can expect on the day of your mastectomy/chest reconstruction consultation appointment.

- Arrive at Plastic Surgery **15 minutes before your scheduled appointment time**. 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 also see the attending plastic surgeon who leads the team and who will be personally involved in all aspects 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 before being scheduled for surgery.
- 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**. If a surgery is determined to be self-pay, **fees are due in full, before the date of surgery**. The surgery scheduler will discuss this with you when reviewing the fees.

### **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 6-8 weeks in advance.

- It will take about 6-8 weeks after your consultation appointment for your insurance company to process your pre-authorization. After we receive the authorization from your insurance company we will schedule your surgery.
- 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 6-8 weeks before the surgery takes place.
- Please note that the estimated wait time for surgery varies, depending on surgeon availability, but **you can generally expect a surgery date 3 to 4 months after the consultation appointment**.

## **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.

### **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 change 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<sup>®</sup>, Advil<sup>®</sup>)
  - Naproxen (Aleve<sup>®</sup>, Naprosyn<sup>®</sup>)
  - 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 interferes with the blood vessels' ability to deliver oxygenated blood to the surgical site. This may result in delayed healing or loss of tissue. Also, 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 (which is medically necessary but is 'elective' in terms of timing) on active smokers.

- We will order a test (urine cotinine) after your consultation, before requesting prior authorization from the insurance company, and before

putting you on the wait list, to confirm you have stopped smoking.

- You have to be smoke free at least four weeks before the test in order for the results to come back negative.
- This means that **you will need to stop smoking 4 weeks before the consultation appointment**. If your results are positive, we will not request insurance pre-authorization and we will not put you on a surgery wait list.
- We recommend that you not resume smoking. However, if you want to resume smoking after surgery, we insist you refrain from smoking at least four weeks after surgery.

### **When can I drive?**

- You **must** have someone to drive you home after surgery; you **cannot drive** yourself home from the procedure.
- **Do not** drive if you are taking pain medications.
- **Do not** plan to drive for the first week after the surgery.
- 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 arrangements with others for your safe transportation.
- Begin driving only when cleared by your surgery team at a follow up appointment. You cannot drive until you are no longer taking any pain medications (narcotics) and you have full range of motion of your arms.

### **When can I return to work?**

- **Plan to return to work in 4-6 weeks**. 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.
- Stay away from any job or sport that risks a blow to your chest for at least 6 weeks.

## **What should I expect during my mastectomy/chest reconstruction recovery period?**

### **What are my post-operative instructions?**

- You must have someone to drive you home after surgery; you **cannot drive** yourself home from the procedure and you should not plan to drive for the first week after the surgery. You **must not** drive if you are taking pain medications.
- You will need help doing even simple things at home for at least 1-2 days.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Follow a balanced diet.
- Decreased activity and taking pain medications may cause constipation, so you may want to add more raw fruit to your diet, and be sure to drink more fluids.
- Take pain medication as prescribed. Do not take aspirin or any products containing aspirin unless approved by your surgeon.
- Do not drink alcohol when taking pain medications.
- Even when not taking pain medications, do not consume alcohol for 3 weeks as it causes fluid retention (extra fluid trapped in your body tissue).
- If you are taking vitamins with iron, you may resume taking them as tolerated.
- Do not smoke, as smoking delays healing and increases the risk of complications.
- Wear your chest compression vest all day, every day for 6 weeks after the surgery.

### **What should my activity level be?**

- Start walking as soon as possible, this helps to reduce swelling and lowers the chance of blood clots.
- For the first week after surgery, your activity should be very restricted. You should plan to spend almost all of your time at home resting.

- You will be released to be more active after your first follow up appointment after the surgery, but you should **avoid** strenuous activity for 4-6 weeks: this includes **avoiding** anything that raises the heart rate, lifting over 5 lbs., and repetitive activity.
- See instructions on driving and returning to work on page 6.
- Avoid sexual activity for a minimum of 2 weeks.
- You can resume full social activities in 10-14 days.

### **How do I take care of my incision?**

#### **Do:**

- Keep incisions clean and inspect daily for signs of infection. Use a light over-dressing as instructed.
- You may have bolster dressings in place on the nipple grafts or surgical drains. You will be instructed specifically on how to care for these.
- If you have Steri-Strips on your incision, leave them in place but don't worry if one or more of them peels off.
- If you have skin glue over your incisions, you may use Vaseline to help dissolve and remove it, after 2 weeks.
- Plan to wear your pressure garment continuously for 6 weeks, (unless otherwise instructed by your surgeon).
- Always use a strong sunblock, if sun exposure is unavoidable (SPF 30 or greater).

#### **Don't:**

- No showering until the bolster dressings are removed. After that, it is all right to shower, even if drains remain in place.
- No tub soaking for 4 weeks, and while sutures or drains are in place.
- Avoid exposing scars to sun for at least 12 months.
- Do not use antibiotic ointments, scar creams, etc., for at least 6 weeks after surgery, unless otherwise instructed by medical staff.



**How should I expect to feel?**

- Minimal to moderate pain after surgery (depending on the procedure performed by the surgeon).
- Temporary bruising, swelling, soreness, burning sensation.
- The worst of your swelling will gradually improve in a few weeks.
- In about 6 weeks, you will be back to all of your normal activities.
- Most swelling and all bruising should be gone in 3-6 months.
- Temporary loss of breast sensation or numbness may last up to a year.

**What will my chest look like?**

- The contour of your chest will be flatter, firmer, and more masculine.
- It will take six or more months before you can see the final results.

**What follow-up care will I receive?**

- Drainage tubes are removed when the output has been less than 30 ml a day, for 2 days (this will vary by surgeon).
- If external sutures were used, they are removed 7-14 days after surgery.

**Doctor's appointments:**

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 resuming hormones and your return to work with your surgeon. Your surgeon will supply documentation for your employer regarding your return to work.

### **When should I call my doctor?**

#### **Call your doctor if you have:**

- Increased swelling or bruising.
- Swelling and redness persisting after a few days.
- Increased redness along the incision.
- Severe or increased pain not relieved by medication.
- Any side effects to medications, such as rash, nausea, headache, vomiting.
- Oral temperature over 100.4 degrees.
- Yellowish or greenish drainage from the incisions or notice a foul odor.
- Bleeding from the incisions that is difficult to control with light pressure.
- Loss of feeling or motion.

## **Surgery timeframe: Patients from within Michigan**

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

1. One month before surgery you must come to Ann Arbor to attend your H&P (History and Physical) examination at the surgeon's office.
2. For the first 1-2 days after surgery, **you will need to have a responsible adult with you (except for very short intervals) 24 hours a day. If there are complications, they will need to stay with you longer than 1 or 2 days.**
3. 7-10 days after surgery there will be a follow-up examination at the surgeon's office.
4. About 2 weeks after surgery you will also have an appointment to get the drains removed. In some cases, this appointment may be combined with the appointment in number 3 above, depending on how you are recuperating, but plan for two separate appointments.
5. 4-6 weeks later you will need to return again for a follow up visit.
6. You may be scheduled for another follow-up visit at 3-4 months after surgery. You will decide this with your surgeon.
7. Any complications can extend your surgery timetable.

## **Surgery timeframe: Patients from Out-of-State**

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 Sunday evening or Monday morning before the surgery date, as you will need to attend your H&P (History and Physical) examination at the surgeon's office on Monday
2. For the first 1-2 days after surgery, **you will need to have a responsible adult with you (except for very short intervals) 24 hours a day. If there are complications, they will need to stay with you longer than 1 or 2 days.**
3. 7-10 days after surgery there will be a follow-up examination at the surgeon's office.
4. About two weeks after surgery you will also have an appointment to get the drains removed. In some cases, this appointment may be combined with the appointment in number 3 above, depending on how you are recuperating, but plan for two separate appointments. **Under no circumstances will you be able to return home before these two appointments.**
5. After the two appointments above, **if everything looks all right to the surgeon and there are no complications**, you may plan to return home understanding that you must keep your appointment in number 6 below. You can return home by car or plane, but the total time for your trip home should be 8 hours or less. **It is strongly recommended that people coming from a great distance stay in Ann Arbor longer.**
6. 4-6 weeks later, you will need to return here for your last follow up visit.
7. Any complications can extend your surgery 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 cover 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 before surgery?

- 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.

## Who should I call if I have questions after surgery?

- (734) 998 - 6022, Monday - Friday, 8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.
- After hours and on weekends, call Hospital Paging at (734) 936-6267 and ask for the Plastic Surgeon on call.

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