

Binding FAQ

What is binding?

Binding refers to the process of flattening one's breast tissue in order to create a male-appearing chest.

What should I use to bind?

There are numerous methods and materials available to be used for binding. Depending on the size of an individual's chest and the overall build of their body the type of materials and methods used for successful binding will vary. An excellent resource about the many different binding options and where to purchase binding materials can be found on the web at Hudson's Guide: FTM Binding. Some common binding techniques are:

- *Layering of Shirts*
Try wearing a tight fitting a-shirt (sleeveless undershirt) or sports bra as a bottom layer to keep things from moving around a lot, then a loose t-shirt (or two loose t-shirts) over that). Each successive layer should be looser than the one underneath. A button down shirt as the top layer can help hide not only the chest but also some of other more female-looking body features that some guys deal with, such as wider hips or narrow shoulders.
- *Ace Bandage Method*
The advantage of this method is that it is fairly inexpensive, but it can be very uncomfortable and restrictive if the bandages are wrapped too tightly. When choosing bandages, try to buy the widest available. Push the breasts away from the center of your chest (squishing them toward the armpit area) to try to flatten the area around the breastbone. If your breasts are very small, you might be able to get away with pushing them up and outward, then flattening, creating the look of pectoral muscles. Wrap the bandages tightly (remember to be able to move reasonably and breathe), and secure with a few safety pins. Make sure to wrap the bandages up high enough to keep the whole thing from slipping or rolling down. You might want to wear an extra t-shirt or a-shirt underneath your clothing to help hide the contours of the bandages and help the chest look more natural.
- *Control-Top Hose/"Biker Shorts" Method*
This method is also inexpensive, but really only effective for individuals with small chests. Buy a pair of women's control-top panty hose, cut off the legs, and carefully make a hole in the crotch area for your head to go through. Pull the binder on upside-down over your head, slipping your arms through the leg holes. You can also try this method with a pair of spandex "biking" shorts (without the padded crotch found in real biker's shorts), but it is a bit more expensive.
- *Sports Bra, "Frog Bra," or "The Bro"*
A tight-fitting sports bra works well for some, while others sometimes use a combination of two or three sports bras in layers to accomplish the desired look. You might want to use a sports bra in combination with a layering of shirts as described above. Many companies make sports bras, and it may be worth the effort to go to a sporting goods store and try on several brands to see which one binds the best for your shape.
- *Neoprene Waist/Abdominal Trimmers or back Support Devices*
Neoprene is a thick, rubbery material--if you've ever seen a wet suit, that's neoprene. It is

often used for things like knee, elbow, or other athletic braces. The advantages of neoprene and rubber-type devices are that they flatten the chest very effectively, are fairly inexpensive (between \$7 and \$20), and are easily found in drug stores or large chain discount stores. The bad thing about them is that the material doesn't breathe at all, which means that sweat, heat, chafing, and even blisters can be a serious problem. They can also smell a bit rubbery. Some individuals wear a shirt with cornstarch or Gold Bond powder underneath the binder to help absorb moisture and prevent chafing.

- *Binding Vests/Compression Shirts*

There are a number of products on the market made for both bio-males who have large chests due to excessive body weight or due to gynecomastia (a condition of enlarged breast tissue in men) as well as for FTMs seeking binding products. These products tend to be a little more expensive than the binding solutions listed above, and usually require going to a specialty supplier, but they tend to provide more comfortable and breathable solutions. "Compression shirts" are made for a variety of uses and while each manufacturer focuses on a different application for their compression products, all can be used effectively for binding, depending on your body type and needs.

Are there any risks associated with binding?

Because binding involves the tight compression of the breasts around the mid section the most common risks associated with binding involve breathing problems and back pain. According to FORGE (*For Ourselves: Reworking Gender Expression*), a national umbrella organization dedicated to education, advocacy and support of the FTM community, some things to keep in mind when binding are:

- It's easy to over compress, which can inhibit the amount of air you can take into your lungs, which obviously results in "breathing issues" - difficulty catching your breath, or just plain difficulties getting enough air.
- Due to the strong pressure from the binder around the chest/back, which changes the normal spine alignment, back pain or other difficulties can occur.
- Out of "fear" that a binding method isn't as effective as they hope it would be, many people "slump" or curve their shoulders, in an effort to conceal the shape of their chest. These postural changes can have significant impact on the ability to breathe easily and fully, as well as issues with back pain, headaches, and other body discomforts.
- Compressing the breast tissue may result in semi- or permanent damage. (While some of the changes in breast tissue may actually make binding easier more elongation and malleability - these changes may be permanent. It is unknown what the long-term effects of damaging the breast tissue may be, or what effect it may have on surgery, if that is desirable.)

Remember to give yourself a break from binding in order to let your skin breathe and to relieve any aches and pains the binder may cause.

If I bind should I be concerned about breast cancer?

While there is no substantial evidence that breast binding leads to breast cancer you should still be concerned about your breast health no matter how you identify on a gender continuum. Individuals should perform monthly self breast examinations and should talk to their health care provider about any particular concerns they might have in regards to breast health and binding. According to a Medical Advisory Bulletin put out by Gender Education & Advocacy, Inc at Gender.org, “2% of all breast cancer occurs in men. Excessive testosterone in men (either FTMs or nontranssexual men) can be converted into estrogen, which may lead to increased risk for estrogen-induced health problems.” FTM persons should keep in mind that, “until mastectomy or chest reconstruction takes place, and especially before initiation of testosterone therapy, they are at the same risk for breast cancer as are women. Even after top surgery, some breast cancer risk may persist in the muscle wall tissue under their surgery sites. Post-operative FTMs should consult their doctors about appropriate screening for their breast cancer risks.”

Sources:

Hudson's Guide: FTM Binding - <http://web.mit.edu/udson/www/binding.html#intro>

FORGE website - <http://www.forge-forward.org/socialsupport/aging-nov2003.html#binding>

Gender.org - <http://www.gender.org/resources/dge/gea02003.pdf>