

What to Expect: Phalloplasty at Michigan Medicine

Department of Surgery



MICHIGAN MEDICINE

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

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What should I expect during my phalloplasty consultation appointments?

The following information explains what you can expect on the day of your phalloplasty consultation appointment at the Plastic Surgery clinic. You will also have consultations with the Urology surgeon and the Obstetrics and Gynecology (OB/GYN) surgeon at their clinics.

- 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 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 appointments?

If your consultation teams determine 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.
- You will need to have your hair at the surgical site removed. Your surgeon

will provide a diagram of the required hair removal during your consultation appointment. You **will not** join the wait list for surgery until the permanent hair removal has been completed. **It takes up to a full year to permanently remove hair.**

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 appointments. You will receive the exact date of your surgery 6-8 weeks ahead of time.

- Once your hair removal at the surgical site is complete, then it will still take an additional 6-8 weeks for your insurance pre-authorization to be processed.
- After insurance authorization is obtained and you've completed hair removal at the surgical site, you will join the wait list for 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 9 to 12 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 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) or
 - 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**.

When can I return to work?

When you plan your leave from work, it would be wise to allow **at least 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:

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 what do I need to bring?

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.
- 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.**

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, and any other surgeons involved with your procedure, 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 6-8 hours. When you awaken, you will be in the Recovery Room.

- You will have on an oxygen mask, an IV, a urinary catheter, and up to three surgical drains (depending on the phalloplasty technique there may be 1 in the arm, 1 in the groin, and 1 in the thigh).
- If you have a hysterectomy and/or vaginectomy at the time of your phalloplasty, you will have 3-4 1/4-inch sized incisions on your abdomen (usually one in your belly button, and one or two on each side of your lower abdomen).
- 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, and surgical drains.
- Your activity in the first few days after surgery will be determined by your surgical team but generally, you will be confined to bed for 1-3 days after surgery.
- After that, you can expect to be able to take a few steps inside your hospital room and sit for short periods of time (example: for your meals) with the assistance of your nurse. Your activity will be limited to your room and short walks in the hall for 5-7 days.
- 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.

- Bathing: on the first day after surgery your dressings will be removed from your abdomen, and you will be able to wash your abdomen.

When will I be discharged from the hospital?

- The length of stay in the hospital is decided as appropriate for each patient, but **expect to be an inpatient for a minimum of 6 to 7 days after the day of surgery.**
- You will receive the approval to shower before your discharge.
- You will receive written instructions regarding medication, names of people to contact with questions, and the dates of your post-operative appointments.
- Your catheter will remain in for several weeks after surgery to allow the urethra to heal. When Urology determines the catheter can be removed, you will see Urology and have a test called a urethrogram or scope to remove the catheter. This is done on an outpatient basis.

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.
- It is not uncommon for there to be some swelling at the surgical site. No ice or tight-fitting garments are to be used until the surgeon gives approval.
- Elevating the neo-phallus with a rolled up towel is fine to help decrease swelling.
- 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.**

- At the time of surgery, a dressing and a plaster splint will be placed on your arm to protect the flap donor site. This dressing and splint will remain in place for 1 week. Once it is removed, you will have a daily dressing change and a removable splint for several more weeks.
- The dressing on the skin graft donor site on the thigh is also left in place for a minimum of 1 week. You may still have a drain in the thigh when you return home.
- 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.
- At these visits, 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.
- If you had a hysterectomy and/or vaginectomy, you will see the gynecologist 6-8 weeks after your surgery.

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. You will be supplied with Bactoshield soap (antibacterial soap) at this appointment. This will be scheduled for **about one month prior to surgery.**
2. Before the week of surgery, you will need to stock up on food as described 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 food available at home.
3. You are to shower from the neck down with the Bactoshield soap that you received during the consultation appointment, on the night before and again on the morning of your surgery. **Do not apply** any deodorant, lotion or powder after these 2 showers. You may resume use of your normal hygiene products after your surgery.
4. As explained above (page 7) 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 to 7 days after the surgery.
6. On the 6th or 7th day after surgery, **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. 7 to 10 days after discharge from the hospital (about 2 weeks after surgery) there will be an examination at Plastic Surgery to check wounds. If drains are still in, they will likely be removed at this visit.
8. 2 to 3 weeks after surgery there will be an examination at Urology, to remove the catheter and for cystoscopy (a test to visually inspect the inside of your urethra and bladder).

9. 4 weeks after surgery there will be another examination at Plastic Surgery. If the forearm is fully healed, the splint will be removed, and you will be able to start Physical or Occupational Therapy. At this point **if everything looks all right to the surgeon and there are no complications**, you will be able to travel.
10. It is also advisable to visit the Plastic Surgery clinic again, at 8 weeks and again at 12 weeks after the surgery.

Complications, especially urethral stricture (narrowed areas) or fistula (abnormal openings), are reported to occur in 30 to 60 out of 100 patients. **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 Sunday evening or Monday 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 Monday.
2. On Monday you will need to stock up on food as described 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 food available in your hotel room.
3. You are to shower from the neck down with the Bactoshield soap that you received during the consultation appointment, on the night before and again on the morning of your surgery. **Do not apply** any deodorant, lotion or powder after these 2 showers. You may resume use of your normal hygiene products after your surgery.
4. As explained above (page 7) 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 to 7 days after the surgery.
6. On the 6th or 7th day after surgery, **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. 7 to 10 days after discharge from the hospital (about 2 weeks after surgery) there will be an examination at Plastic Surgery to check wounds. If drains are still in, they will likely be removed at this visit.
8. 2 to 3 weeks after surgery there will be an examination at Urology, to remove the catheter and for cystoscopy (a test to visually inspect the inside of your urethra and bladder)..
9. 4 weeks after surgery there will be another examination at Plastic Surgery. If

the forearm is fully healed, the splint will be removed, and you will be able to start Physical or Occupational Therapy. **Under no circumstances will you be able to return home prior to this day.**

10. At this point (4 weeks 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 visits at 4 and 8 weeks after that (8 and 12 weeks following surgery). 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.**

Complications, especially urethral stricture (narrowed areas) or fistula (abnormal openings), are reported to occur in 30 to 60 out of 100 patients. **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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