

What to Know About Recovery from Gender Affirmation Surgery

Gender affirmation surgery – like any surgery – includes a recovery period. The time you spend healing is just as important as the surgery itself. But recovery doesn't happen overnight, and you may need to [take some steps now to prepare](#) for the days and weeks following your surgery.

As your surgery date gets close, you may experience a range of emotions. You may have questions about what recovery will look like. Whether you are having top, bottom, or facial surgery, here are some things to keep in mind about your recovery.

Recovery May Take Longer Than You Expect

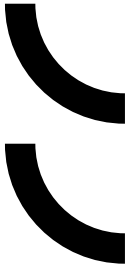
Preparing for the unknown is always hard, and this can be especially true when planning for gender affirmation surgery. Even if you've done your research, your experience may be very different from what you expect. Everyone's body, surgery, and recovery will be different, and that's OK.

Your body may not bounce back as fast as you thought it would. Easy tasks may be challenging or even off limits. For example, your doctor may instruct you to avoid lifting your arms after top surgery. And the level of pain and how long it lasts might be more than you expected.

Recovery isn't a straight line. It will have its ups and downs. If your recovery doesn't look or feel exactly how you planned, don't panic. Be gentle with your body – and your expectations – as you heal.

Everyone deserves health care that respects their gender identity. VNS Health supports the unique needs of transgender and nonbinary individuals undergoing and recovering from gender affirmation surgery.

Learn About Our Gender Affirmation Program



Coordinating Caregiving Is Key

Your recovery should include rest, medication, and following your doctor's orders, as well as caregiving support.

Caregivers can help as you heal after your surgery. They can prep meals and do chores. Or they can help out with tasks like keeping track of your medicines or monitoring your surgical site. These are big responsibilities, and just because someone is a good friend doesn't necessarily mean they will be a good caregiver.

Try to plan for at least three caregivers who can help you in shifts and be responsible for different tasks. Having several caregivers also means you will have backup support if you need it. Sometimes, a person may realize that the responsibility is too much for them and may need to step away. This can leave you in a tough spot if you have only one caregiver.

Even if you have loved ones who can care for you, professional home care can be a beneficial part of your recovery. A nurse can provide skilled medical services like emptying drains, supporting with dilation, and changing bandages. They can also answer your questions and reassure you. A nurse can also bring in other professionals, like rehab therapists, social workers, and home health aides. Having an expert team during your recovery can give you extra support and peace of mind.

Your Surgery May Bring Up Big Feelings

Sometimes it's not so much about the physical recovery from gender affirmation surgery as about how you react to it. After your surgery, you may experience a range of emotions – and they may not be ones you expect.

Before your surgery, you may think that everything will fall into place or that you'll feel joyful right after your surgery. You might, but you might not – or you might swing from relief to doubt. Feeling sad or scared or angry during your recovery is normal. Your feelings – whatever they may be – are valid.

Feelings and emotions aren't simple, and they definitely aren't predictable. It's all right if you don't feel happy or joyous after your surgery. It's okay if you feel regret in the days, weeks, or even months afterwards. Try not to feel guilty about having feelings. Processing such a big experience can take time, and your reactions aren't wrong – they're yours. Processing them is part of your recovery, just like physical healing.

Start Preparing for Your Recovery Now

Although many aspects of your healing will be unpredictable, you *can* take steps to prepare mentally and physically. Prior to gender affirmation surgery, you can:

- Ask your surgeon about your recovery period and discharge instructions, including supplies you will need. **Tip:** Have the supplies on hand before you come home from the hospital.
- Ask people in your life to provide caregiving support after your surgery, starting with a ride home from the

hospital.

- Talk to other people about their gender affirmation surgeries. Online communities like Reddit or a virtual support group may even help you connect with people who have worked with your specific surgeon.
- Prepare your home for your recovery. Make the space comfy, and put commonly used items like your phone charger and the TV remote within reach.
- Secure a gender-affirming therapist prior to surgery. It is recommended that you have access to a licensed mental health professional who can provide the ongoing emotional support you need before your surgery and during and after your recovery.

Your surgeon will order home care services as part of your discharge instructions. Ask specifically about LGBTQ+ focused home care, like the Gender Affirmation Program at VNS Health. By starting your preparation early, you and your loved ones can feel more comfortable and confident in your recovery.