



How to: Mentally Prepare for Top Surgery

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HELLO! FIRST OFF, CONGRATULATIONS! IF YOU'RE READING THIS, YOU'RE PROBABLY EXPLORING GENDER AFFIRMING CARE. JUST BY TAKING THE TIME TO EXPLORE, YOU HAVE SHOWN YOURSELF LOVE AND COMPASSION. NO MATTER WHAT PATH YOU CHOOSE, THIS JOURNEY IS PERSONAL TO YOU. SURGERIES, HORMONES, AND GENDER EXPRESSION ARE AMAZING, BUT THEY DO NOT DEFINE YOUR IDENTITY. HOW YOU IDENTIFY WILL ALWAYS BE YOURS, REGARDLESS OF IF YOUR JOURNEY GOES WITH THE GRAIN, AGAINST THE GRAIN, OR SOMEWHERE IN BETWEEN. SECONDLY, THANKS FOR TAKING THE TIME TO EXPLORE THIS SHORT HOW-TO BOOK.

ABOUT ME

I'M HAYDEN AND I WANT TO SHARE A LITTLE BIT ABOUT MYSELF BEFORE WE JUMP INTO IT. WHEN I STARTED MY TRANSITION IN 2014, THERE WERE VERY FEW RESOURCES THAT WERE EASILY ACCESSIBLE. AFTER GOING THROUGH THE PROCESS MYSELF, I FOUND A PASSION TO PROVIDE SERVICES TO THE QUEER COMMUNITY. I WENT TO UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII TO GET MY BA IN PSYCHOLOGY, AND JOHN F. KENNEDY UNIVERSITY TO GET MY MA IN SPORT PSYCHOLOGY. DURING MY MASTER'S PROGRAM, I FOCUSED ON LGBTQ+ ATHLETES AND LEARNED MORE ABOUT WHAT SUPPORTS OUR COMMUNITY NEEDED. IN 2023, MY BUSINESS PARTNER AND I WERE ABLE TO OPEN A GYM IN SACRAMENTO CALIFORNIA, QUEERS AND ALLIES FITNESS. NOW, I'VE DECIDED TO TRY CREATING SOMETHING THAT HELPS PEOPLE FIND INFORMATION QUICKLY INSTEAD OF HAVING TO SCROLL THROUGH A BUNCH OF WEBSITES AND HOPING FOR THE BEST. HAVING DONE THIS MYSELF, I KNOW HOW EXHAUSTING IT CAN BE! IN THIS BOOK YOU WILL FIND SOME TOOLS AND SKILLS THAT I HAVE BEEN TAUGHT THROUGH MY EDUCATION AND VARIOUS MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAMS I HAVE GONE THROUGH. IT WOULD HAVE BEEN EXTREMELY HELPFUL TO HAVE SOME OF THESE SKILLS MASTERED WHEN GETTING READY TO START HORMONE REPLACEMENT THERAPY AND PREPPING FOR TOP SURGERY. THESE SKILLS ARE SUPER TRANSFERABLE, AND I HOPE THAT YOU FIND YOURSELF TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THEM DURING YOUR DAY-TO-DAY LIFE. ALL THAT BEING SAID, I HOPE YOU FIND THIS TO BE A USEFUL TOOL TO HELP YOU ON YOUR JOURNEY.

INTRODUCTION

GENDER-AFFIRMING SURGERY REFERS TO A VARIETY OF MEDICAL PROCEDURES DESIGNED TO HELP INDIVIDUALS ALIGN THEIR PHYSICAL APPEARANCE WITH THEIR GENDER IDENTITY. THESE SURGERIES ARE OFTEN A CRUCIAL COMPONENT OF GENDER TRANSITION FOR TRANSGENDER AND NON-BINARY INDIVIDUALS. TOP SURGERY, IN PARTICULAR, IS A TYPE OF GENDER-AFFIRMING SURGERY THAT FOCUSES ON ALTERING THE CHEST AREA.

TOP SURGERY:

1. PURPOSE:

- FOR TRANSGENDER MEN (FEMALE-TO-MALE): TOP SURGERY FOR TRANSGENDER MEN INVOLVES THE REMOVAL OF BREAST TISSUE TO CREATE A MORE MASCULINE CHEST CONTOUR. THIS PROCEDURE IS OFTEN CALLED CHEST MASCULINIZATION OR CHEST RECONSTRUCTION.**
- FOR NON-BINARY INDIVIDUALS: NON-BINARY INDIVIDUALS MAY ALSO CHOOSE TOP SURGERY TO ACHIEVE A CHEST APPEARANCE THAT ALIGNS WITH THEIR GENDER IDENTITY.**

2. CONSULTATION AND PLANNING:

- BEFORE UNDERGOING TOP SURGERY, INDIVIDUALS TYPICALLY UNDERGO CONSULTATIONS WITH SURGEONS TO DISCUSS THEIR GOALS, REVIEW AVAILABLE OPTIONS, AND ADDRESS ANY CONCERNS.**

INTRODUCTION CONTINUED

3. EMOTIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT:

- TOP SURGERY CAN HAVE A PROFOUND IMPACT ON A PERSON'S MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING, HELPING THEM FEEL MORE ALIGNED WITH THEIR GENDER IDENTITY.

IT'S IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT GENDER-AFFIRMING SURGERIES ARE DEEPLY PERSONAL DECISIONS, AND INDIVIDUALS MAY CHOOSE TO PURSUE OR FORGO THESE PROCEDURES BASED ON THEIR UNIQUE NEEDS AND PREFERENCES. SUPPORT FROM MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS AND A STRONG SUPPORT SYSTEM IS OFTEN RECOMMENDED THROUGHOUT THE TRANSITION PROCESS. REMEMBER TO HAVE SELF-COMPASSION BECAUSE THIS IS HARD, AND YOU CAN DO HARD THINGS!

MENTAL PREPARATION FOR TOP SURGERY

MENTAL PREPARATION FOR TOP SURGERY IS ESSENTIAL TO NAVIGATE THE EMOTIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF THE PROCESS. INDIVIDUALS CONSIDERING TOP SURGERY SHOULD:

1. CLARIFY EXPECTATIONS:

- UNDERSTAND THE ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES, POTENTIAL CHALLENGES, AND THE REALISTIC IMPACT OF SURGERY ON SELF-IMAGE.**

2. EMBRACE REALISM:

- ACKNOWLEDGE THAT PERFECTION MAY NOT BE ATTAINABLE, AND OUTCOMES CAN VARY. EMBRACE THE IDEA OF PROGRESS RATHER THAN PERFECTION. THIS WAS PARTICULARLY DIFFICULT FOR ME, AS I TEND TO LEAN TOWARD PERFECTIONISM!**

3. RESEARCH AND EDUCATION:

- EDUCATE YOURSELF ABOUT THE SURGICAL PROCEDURE, RECOVERY PROCESS, AND POTENTIAL EMOTIONAL RESPONSES. KNOWLEDGE CAN ALLEVIATE ANXIETY.**

4. EMOTIONAL SUPPORT SYSTEM:

- CULTIVATE A STRONG SUPPORT SYSTEM OF FRIENDS, FAMILY, OR SUPPORT GROUPS TO PROVIDE EMOTIONAL SUPPORT BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER SURGERY.**

5. THERAPEUTIC GUIDANCE:

- ENGAGE WITH MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS WHO SPECIALIZE IN GENDER IDENTITY ISSUES TO ADDRESS PRE-EXISTING CONCERNS AND DEVELOP COPING STRATEGIES.**

MENTAL PREPARATION FOR TOP SURGERY

6. VISUALIZE YOUR DESIRED POST-SURGERY SELF:

- **IMAGINE THE POSITIVE IMPACT OF TOP SURGERY ON MENTAL WELL-BEING AND SELF-CONFIDENCE. VISUALIZING THE DESIRED POST-SURGERY SELF CAN BE EMPOWERING.**

7. ACCEPTANCE OF CHANGE:

- **BE PREPARED FOR CHANGES, BOTH PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL, AND UNDERSTAND THAT ADAPTATION IS A NATURAL PART OF THE TRANSITION PROCESS.**

8. RESILIENCE BUILDING:

- **DEVELOP RESILIENCE BY FOCUSING ON STRENGTHS, SELF-ACCEPTANCE, AND COPING MECHANISMS TO NAVIGATE POTENTIAL CHALLENGES. AFFIRMATIONS CAN BE GREAT FOR THIS!**

9. CLEAR COMMUNICATION:

- **COMMUNICATE OPENLY WITH HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS, ENSURING THAT EXPECTATIONS, CONCERNS, AND QUESTIONS ARE ADDRESSED DURING CONSULTATIONS. ADVOCATE FOR YOURSELF OR HAVE SOMEBODY HELP YOU.**

10. MINDFULNESS AND RELAXATION TECHNIQUES:

- **PRACTICE MINDFULNESS AND RELAXATION TECHNIQUES TO MANAGE STRESS AND ANXIETY. TECHNIQUES LIKE DEEP BREATHING OR MEDITATION CAN BE BENEFICIAL.**

11. POST-OPERATIVE PLANNING:

- **DEVELOP A POST-OPERATIVE PLAN, INCLUDING PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS LIKE RECOVERY SPACE, SUPPORTIVE INDIVIDUALS, AND ASSISTANCE WITH DAILY TASKS DURING THE INITIAL WEEKS.**

MENTAL PREPARATION FOR TOP SURGERY

12. SELF-REFLECTION:

- **REFLECT ON PERSONAL IDENTITY, GOALS, AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SURGERY IN THE CONTEXT OF YOUR GENDER JOURNEY.**

13. ADDRESSING FEARS:

- **ACKNOWLEDGE AND ADDRESS FEARS OR ANXIETIES RELATED TO SURGERY. OPENLY DISCUSSING CONCERNS WITH HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS AND SUPPORT SYSTEMS CAN PROVIDE REASSURANCE.**

14. PATIENCE AND SELF-COMPASSION:

- **UNDERSTAND THAT THE EMOTIONAL JOURNEY IS ONGOING. PRACTICE PATIENCE AND SELF-COMPASSION, RECOGNIZING THAT HEALING TAKES TIME.**

15. POST-SURGERY SELF-CARE:

- **PLAN FOR POST-SURGERY SELF-CARE, INCLUDING ADEQUATE REST, NUTRITION, AND ENGAGING IN ACTIVITIES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING.**

MENTAL PREPARATION INVOLVES A HOLISTIC APPROACH THAT INTEGRATES EMOTIONAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL, AND PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS. IT'S A JOURNEY OF SELF-DISCOVERY AND SELF-EMPOWERMENT THAT CONTRIBUTES TO A POSITIVE SURGICAL EXPERIENCE AND A HEALTHIER POST-SURGERY TRANSITION. DIVE INTO THE PRACTICE OF SOME OF THESE SKILLS AND THEY WILL HELP YOU IN AREAS BEYOND TRANSITIONING.

SUPPORT SYSTEM

1. EMOTIONAL SUPPORT:

- **FAMILY AND FRIENDS: UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPORTIVE FAMILY AND FRIENDS WHO RESPECT THE YOUR IDENTITY AND DECISIONS.**
- **MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL: A THERAPIST OR COUNSELOR EXPERIENCED IN GENDER IDENTITY ISSUES WHO CAN PROVIDE EMOTIONAL SUPPORT AND COPING STRATEGIES.**
- **SUPPORT GROUPS: CONNECTION WITH LOCAL OR ONLINE TRANSGENDER SUPPORT GROUPS WHERE INDIVIDUALS CAN SHARE EXPERIENCES, ADVICE, AND ENCOURAGEMENT. IF YOU'RE LOCAL TO SACRAMENTO, CA, PLEASE STOP BY QUEERS AND ALLIES FITNESS IF YOU NEED SUPPORT!**

2. PRACTICAL SUPPORT:

- **HEALTHCARE NAVIGATOR: SOMEONE WHO CAN HELP NAVIGATE THE HEALTHCARE SYSTEM, INCLUDING INSURANCE PAPERWORK AND COORDINATING APPOINTMENTS. TALK TO YOUR INSURANCE OR THE MEDICAL STAFF WHERE YOU ARE HAVING SURGERY TO ASK IF THEY PROVIDE THIS SUPPORT.**
- **FINANCIAL ADVISOR: ASSISTANCE IN MANAGING THE FINANCIAL ASPECTS OF SURGERY, INCLUDING UNDERSTANDING INSURANCE COVERAGE AND EXPLORING POTENTIAL FUNDING OPTIONS.**

3. PHYSICAL SUPPORT:

- **PERSONAL TRAINER: A PERSONAL TRAINER CAN PLAY A VALUABLE ROLE IN PHYSICAL PREPARATION AND RECOVERY. THEY CAN DESIGN A PRE-SURGERY FITNESS PLAN TO OPTIMIZE HEALTH AND ASSIST WITH POST-SURGERY EXERCISES THAT PROMOTE HEALING. A PERSONAL TRAINER CAN TAILOR WORKOUTS TO THE INDIVIDUAL'S NEEDS AND ANY SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE SURGEON.**

SUPPORT SYSTEM

- **PRE-SURGERY FITNESS PLAN: FOCUS ON OVERALL FITNESS, CARDIOVASCULAR HEALTH, AND STRENGTHENING CORE MUSCLES. THIS CAN CONTRIBUTE TO A SMOOTHER RECOVERY PROCESS.**
- **POST-SURGERY EXERCISES: ASSIST WITH EXERCISES THAT PROMOTE FLEXIBILITY AND PREVENT STIFFNESS. GUIDANCE ON GRADUALLY REINTRODUCING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IS ESSENTIAL.**
- **MASSAGE THERAPIST: MASSAGE THERAPY CAN SERVE AS A VALUABLE ADJUNCT IN BOTH THE PREOPERATIVE PREPARATION AND POSTOPERATIVE RECOVERY PHASES OF TOP SURGERY. PREOPERATIVELY, IT PROVES BENEFICIAL IN MITIGATING MUSCLE TENSION AND REDUCING PRE-SURGICAL ANXIETY. POSTOPERATIVELY, MASSAGE THERAPY IS INSTRUMENTAL IN ADDRESSING SCAR TISSUE, MITIGATING THE FORMATION OF ADHESIONS, ENHANCING THE FLEXIBILITY OF SCAR TISSUE, AND IMPROVEMENT OF RANGE OF MOTION BY EFFECTIVELY ADDRESSING MUSCLE TIGHTNESS AND STIFFNESS THAT MAY MANIFEST AS A CONSEQUENCE OF THE SURGICAL PROCEDURE. HOWEVER, IT IS IMPORTANT TO BE CAUTIOUS AND TALK OPENLY WITH YOUR DOCTOR BEFORE INCORPORATING POSTOPERATIVE MASSAGE THERAPY INTO YOUR RECOVERY REGIMEN.**

SUPPORT SYSTEM

4.LOGISTICAL SUPPORT:

- **TIME OFF: COMMUNICATE WITH YOUR EMPLOYER ABOUT GETTING TIME OFF. REMEMBER THAT YOU DO NOT HAVE TO DISCLOSE ANY DETAILS OF YOUR MEDICAL CARE TO YOUR EMPLOYER.**
- **TRANSPORTATION: ASSISTANCE WITH TRANSPORTATION TO AND FROM MEDICAL APPOINTMENTS, ESPECIALLY DURING THE INITIAL STAGES OF RECOVERY WHEN MOBILITY MAY BE LIMITED.**
- **MEAL PREPARATION: HELP WITH MEAL PLANNING AND PREPARATION, ENSURING THE YOU HAVE NUTRITIOUS AND EASILY ACCESSIBLE FOOD DURING THE RECOVERY PERIOD.**

5.COMMUNICATION SUPPORT:

- **ADVOCATE: HAVING AN ADVOCATE WHO CAN COMMUNICATE WITH MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS, INSURANCE PROVIDERS, AND OTHERS ON YOUR BEHALF, ESPECIALLY DURING STRESSFUL TIMES. THIS COULD BE AN INSURANCE CASE MANAGER, CARE COORDINATOR, OR PATIENT NAVIGATOR (CHECK TO SEE IF YOUR HEALTH INSURANCE OFFERS THIS). IT COULD ALSO BE YOUR THERAPIST, OTHER TRUSTED HEALTHCARE PROVIDER, OR EVEN A FRIEND WHO IS HEALTHCARE-SAVVY.**

SUMMARY

MENTAL AND PHYSICAL PREPARATION FOR TOP SURGERY CAN BE INVALUABLE FOR ACHIEVING OPTIMAL OUTCOMES. YOU SHOULD PRIORITIZE SELF-CARE AND WORK CLOSELY WITH YOUR HEALTHCARE TEAM TO ENSURE YOU ARE INFORMED AND ADEQUATELY PREPARED FOR THE SURGERY. PRE-OPERATIVE NUTRITION SHOULD BE CONSIDERED, PHYSICAL ACTIVITY SHOULD BE MONITORED, AND CAUTION SHOULD BE TAKEN WHEN INVOLVED IN ACTIVITIES THAT CAN IMPEDE HEALING. POST-OPERATIVE PHYSICAL THERAPY SHOULD BE DISCUSSED WITH HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS PRIOR TO SURGERY, AS WELL AS ANY EXPECTATIONS FOR ACTIVITY MODIFICATION DURING THE RECOVERY PROCESS. FINALLY, IT IS IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND THE IMPORTANCE OF MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL PREPARATION, ALONG WITH ANY POTENTIAL CHALLENGES THAT MAY ARISE DURING THE RECOVERY PROCESS.

IT IS ESSENTIAL TO APPROACH TOP SURGERY FROM A COMPREHENSIVE AND HOLISTIC PERSPECTIVE. PHYSICAL AND MENTAL PREPARATION ALLOWS YOU TO BEST PREPARE FOR THE SURGERY AND MANAGE THE RECOVERY PROCESS. WORKING CLOSELY WITH YOUR HEALTHCARE TEAM, ALONG WITH A FOCUS ON SELF-CARE, CAN RESULT IN A SAFER AND MORE SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION DURING GENDER-AFFIRMING PROCEDURES. YOU'VE GOT THIS AND YOU DON'T HAVE TO DO IT ALONE. <3

RESOURCES

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ON TOP SURGERY AND GENDER-AFFIRMING CARE, THERE ARE VARIOUS REPUTABLE RESOURCES AVAILABLE. HERE ARE SOME SUGGESTIONS:

1. PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS:

- WORLD PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR TRANSGENDER HEALTH (WPATH):
 - WEBSITE: [WPATH](#)
 - WPATH SETS STANDARDS FOR THE CARE OF TRANSGENDER INDIVIDUALS AND PROVIDES RESOURCES FOR HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS AND THE PUBLIC.
- AMERICAN SOCIETY OF PLASTIC SURGEONS (ASPS):
 - WEBSITE: [ASPS](#)
 - THE ASPS OFFERS INFORMATION ON PLASTIC SURGERY PROCEDURES, INCLUDING THOSE RELATED TO GENDER AFFIRMATION.

2. GENDER-AFFIRMING SURGERY CENTERS:

- RESEARCH GENDER-AFFIRMING SURGERY CENTERS AND CLINICS THAT SPECIALIZE IN TRANSGENDER CARE. THEY OFTEN PROVIDE EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS, FAQs, AND RESOURCES. EXAMPLES INCLUDE:
 - [CENTER OF EXCELLENCE FOR TRANSGENDER HEALTH](#)
 - [THE GENDER CONFIRMATION CENTER](#)

RESOURCES

3.ONLINE FORUMS AND SUPPORT GROUPS:

- **CONNECT WITH ONLINE COMMUNITIES AND SUPPORT GROUPS WHERE INDIVIDUALS SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES AND INFORMATION. EXAMPLES INCLUDE:**
 - **TRANSGENDER SURGERY SUBREDDIT**
 - **LOCAL TRANSGENDER FACEBOOK GROUPS**

4.BOOKS AND PUBLICATIONS:

- **“TRANS BODIES, TRANS SELVES” BY LAURA ERICKSON-SCHROTH:**
 - **THIS COMPREHENSIVE RESOURCE COVERS VARIOUS ASPECTS OF TRANSGENDER HEALTH, INCLUDING SURGERIES.**
- **“GENDER EUPHORIA” BY LAURA KATE DALE:**
 - **“IN THIS GROUNDBREAKING ANTHOLOGY, NINETEEN TRANS, NON-BINARY, AGENDER, GENDER-FLUID, AND INTERSEX WRITERS SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES OF GENDER EUPHORIA”**

5.MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT:

- **NATIONAL ALLIANCE ON MENTAL ILLNESS (NAMI):**
 - **WEBSITE: NAMI**
 - **NAMI PROVIDES RESOURCES ON MENTAL HEALTH, AND LOCAL CHAPTERS MAY OFFER SUPPORT FOR INDIVIDUALS NAVIGATING GENDER IDENTITY AND MENTAL HEALTH.**

RESOURCES

- **PSYCHOLOGY TODAY:**

- **WEBSITE: [PSYCHOLOGYTODAY.COM](https://www.psychologytoday.com)**
- **A GREAT WAY TO FIND MENTAL HEALTH PROVIDERS. YOU CAN FILTER BY LOCATION, INSURANCE, AND SPECIALTIES.**

6.EDUCATIONAL WEBSITES:

- **OUTCARE HEALTH:**

- **WEBSITE: [OUTCAREHEALTH.ORG](https://www.outcarehealth.org)**
- **MYTRANSHEALTH IS A DIRECTORY THAT HELPS CONNECT TRANSGENDER INDIVIDUALS WITH COMPETENT AND COMPASSIONATE HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS.**

- **GLAAD:**

- **WEBSITE: [GLAAD](https://www.glaad.org)**
- **GLAAD PROVIDES INFORMATION AND RESOURCES ON LGBTQ+ ISSUES, INCLUDING HEALTHCARE AND GENDER IDENTITY.**