

Vaginoplasty: Care After Surgery

Follow your discharge instructions to help you recover. Most people get better each day after surgery, but it may take a while to fully recover. You will slowly feel stronger and become more active.

If you have any questions,
please talk with your
physician.

Activity and general precautions

- › Switch your position between sitting and lying down to ease constant pressure on any one part of the body.
- › Do not sit flat or put too much pressure on the wound area.
- › Sit on an inflatable donut cushion to relieve pressure.
- › Do not move your legs far away from the middle of your body at the hip (hip abduction).
- › Try to walk as much as you are able.
- › Do not do exercises that raise your heart rate.
- › Do not have sexual activity for 6 to 8 weeks.
- › Do not do activities that put pressure on your genital area such as riding a cycle and horseback riding.
- › Do not lift anything heavier than a gallon of milk.

For comfort

You can put cool packs on the wound area, but only for 10 minutes at a time.

Take medication for pain as directed by your physician. Do not drive while taking prescription pain medication.

Save your energy

After surgery, it is common to feel like you do not have enough energy to do your daily activities. Try to save your energy by doing these things:

- › Plan out your day and do the most important tasks first.
- › Switch between harder tasks and lighter tasks.
- › Take rest breaks often.
- › Do tasks sitting down as much as possible.
- › Ask for help if you need it.

Getting dressed

- › Wear loose-fitting underwear such as boxer briefs or mesh underwear.
- › If you wear pants, make sure they are loose-fitting.
- › Put your ankle on the opposite knee to put on and take off lower body clothing.
- › Use a reacher, shoe horn or sock aid to make getting dressed easier

Going to the bathroom

It is common to feel like you need to urinate more often. Follow these guidelines when using the toilet.

- › Wash your hands before and after toileting.
- › Wipe from the front to the back after urinating or having bowel movements.

Showering

Keep the wound area clean by showering and using mild soap. Follow these guidelines:

- › Do not take a tub bath, swim or use a hot tub for 4 weeks.
- › Use a peri-bottle filled with warm, soapy water to clean the wound area each day. Then, rinse well with clean water and pat dry with a clean towel.
- › Do not scrub or rub the wound area.
- › You can use a long-handled sponge and/or a shower chair to make showering easier.

Vaginal dilation

It is very important to dilate your vagina to keep it open. If you do not dilate your vagina, the vaginal canal will close.

Most patients start vaginal dilation 1 week after the care team removes the vaginal packing. Most people who have had a vaginoplasty will usually dilate their vagina 2 times a day for 15 minutes each time. Make sure you have a space in your home where you have privacy to do this. Your care team will show you how to do the vaginal dilation.

How to use a vaginal dilator

Use the vaginal dilator 2 times each day. A good time to do this is before taking a shower in the morning and before going to bed at night.

Follow these steps:

1. Clean the dilator by washing it with antibacterial soap and warm water before each use.
2. Apply a water-based lubricant to the dilator before you put it in.
3. Gently put the dilator into your vagina angled forward towards the pubic bone. Feeling tenderness is normal. But if you feel extreme pain, stop and contact your surgeon.
4. Insert the dilator the full depth of your vagina until you feel pressure and some resistance.
5. Leave the dilator in place for 15 minutes.
6. Take the dilator out and clean it with antibacterial soap and water.

Contact your physician if you have questions. If you are having a hard time with vaginal dilation, we will help you. If needed, we may help you arrange to work with a pelvic floor physical therapist.

Follow-up visits

It is important to keep your follow-up appointments with your surgeon, even if you are feeling well. Plan to return to the Northwestern Memorial Hospital clinic once a week for 4 to 6 weeks after your surgery. Your care team will check your wounds and help you with vaginal dilation. Then, visits will continue as needed, until about 3 months after surgery.

When to call your physician

Contact your physician if you have any of these symptoms:

- › Wound swelling or redness that worsens
- › Foul-smelling odors or discharge
- › A sudden increase in pain
- › A temperature of 101 degrees F or higher
- › Opening of any incisions

If you have any questions or concerns, please ask your surgeon or nurse.

Community resources

For support, visit these sites:

Center on Halsted

This is a LGBTQ community center in Chicago that offers programming, events, behavioral health services and support groups.

To learn more, go to centeronhalsted.org

Chicago Gender Society

This group holds monthly meetings, social events and support groups for people to safely explore their gender identity.

To learn more, go to chicagogender.org

Howard Brown Health

This organization provides programming, support groups, and medical and behavioral health services to address barriers faced by transgender and gender non-conforming people.

To learn more, go to howardbrown.org

Project VIDA

This organization takes a holistic approach to reduce health disparities among underserved communities through support groups, wellness programs, case management and health prevention (testing and education).

To learn more, go to projectvida.org

For more information about Northwestern Medicine, please visit our website at nm.org.

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