

Questions to Ask Your Surgeon When Planning for Top Surgery!

When attending a consult with a surgeon it can feel really overwhelming! The surgeon will ask you some questions about what your expectations of surgery are, measure your chest to plan the type of procedure and ask you if you have any questions for them. The surgeon may also take photos of your chest (with your consent) for 'before and after' images and planning the actual procedure. This document aims to help a person get the most from their consult with the surgeon, and hopefully, reduce pre-operative anxiety.

➤ **Upon meeting the surgeon:**

- *Have you performed chest surgery on a transgender man / trans masc person before?*

Procedures for top surgery are very different to gynecomastia of cisgender males. The training required is also different and requires specialist knowledge. It is within your rights to ask the surgeon:

- What are your qualifications and experience in working with people like myself?
- How many procedures have you done like this and what were the outcomes?
- What additional training did you receive and from whom?

- *Can you show me examples of previous surgeries that you have done before, with my body shape and type?*

To see if the surgeon is right for you, it is important to see examples of their work. This can give you a realistic expectation of your surgical outcomes.

- *What do you think is going to be the best procedure for me/my body type?*

You and your surgeon need to discuss what is going to give you the best desired outcome. This can mean:

- What surgery type do you think is going to be right for me and why do you believe this?
- Can I see examples of this surgery type that you have done before?
- Do I get to have an opinion on scar placement and incision locations and shapes?
- Can I provide input on a nipple graft option and what size they are?
- What is your success rate with nipple grafts and, upon success, the sensation reported by individuals?

➤ **Preparing for the surgery:**

- *What is required of me to get the most from Top Surgery?*

For example, your surgeon may ask you if you are taking any medications (prescribed or over the counter), smoke tobacco, drink alcohol or use any other substances (including illicit), as these may impact your mental and physical wellbeing during surgery and recovery. Be honest. You are paying a lot for surgery and don't want to jeopardise your outcomes and recovery time.

- *If I need a revision, what is your policy on doing so?*
 - Is there a minimum time from for healing before I can have a revision?
 - What costs may be involved, if I need a revision?
 - What is the maximum amount of time I am eligible to receive a revision from you and, if applicable, would this be at a lowered/no cost?

- *If I might experience "dog-ear" type folds, how do you attempt to minimize this in the first procedure?*

Some doctors may use liposuction (or other techniques within the initial surgery) to minimize this outcome and reduce the likelihood of needing a revision procedure, as it is the most common reason for revision. For some people, particularly those with larger breast tissue and those who may be overweight (increased fat tissue in the chest), this "dog-ear" effect may occur and should be enquired about to ensure you are as happy with the procedure and outcomes as possible. It can help to ask:

- If not done within the first operation, is this something done within the revision process and does this have additional costs?

- *What are your fees for surgery and how do you break this down?*

This is really important, especially if you have health insurance, as this can impact what Medicare Item Codes are used to claim back funds from your health insurance provider and Medicare.

- What is your full break down of costs, including: surgeon and surgical fee, anesthetist, hospital or facility charges (especially if staying overnight), health fund fees/rebates? If staying overnight, check your insurer covers this facility.
- Are there other costs, such as a surgical binder, that I need to know about?
- What Medicare Item Numbers do you use, that I can quote to my Health Insurance Provider and Medicare?
- Do you have a preference for health care insurance providers? (If you already have health insurance with a different provider, ask the surgeon if they have worked with them before and their experience in obtaining rebates and coverage.)

➤ **Discussing your recovery:**

- *How long should I take off from work / study / other, to recover?* This can vary greatly depending on what your day-to-day activities are and should be asked about in detail. It can also help to check:
 - When can I exercise / play sports / hang washing / lift a pet or child safely?
 - When should I be safe to drive a car (check for automatic or manual, depending on your vehicle) or use public transport?
- *Will I have drains post-op and how long until they are removed?*

This will depend on the surgeon and surgery type. If you do have drains, typically they are only in for a few days to a week, but may require extra care instructions.

- *Will I experience much pain and movement restriction post-op?*

Again, this is very individual, but it can help to check because some post-op care instructions will help minimize pain and reduce the likelihood of scarring damage.

Check with the surgeon:

- What are the best ways to manage pain, both in regard to movement and medications? Always read and follow instructions regarding medications, as some may have undesirable side effects.
 - How is it best to sleep and sit to reduce pain and limit scarring damage?
 - Do I need to wear a post-op binder? If so, how long for and can I take it off if I really need to?
 - What do you recommend for a recovery plan (e.g. aftercare and transportation, planning for possible complications, showering needs and cleaning of bed linen, diet, etc.)?
- *When, and how often, will I need to return to see you for post-op care?*

➤ **If travelling interstate for surgery:**

- *How long will it be after surgery until I can leave the state to travel home?*

Tell the surgeon how you intend to travel, such as by car or plane, and if you have a support person, as this may impact their advice. Once home, you may also need post-op care or have questions about your recovery. It can help to ask:

- Do I need to return to you at any time for post-op care? Ask if this is 'in-person' or via skype, as this can save travel costs.
- If appropriate and needed, does my GP require any specific information to help with wound and post-op care when I return home?

➤ **Final words:**

It can be a good idea to take with you a list of questions, a pen and piece of paper, so you can take notes and record details. It can also help to take someone with you, so that you can both ask questions and remember things as they arise.

Remember, this is your surgery and it is important that the surgeon allows you to ask questions and feel comfortable with the answers. Also, keep in mind that the surgeon will guide you with their experience and knowledge. Together, you can hopefully get the best outcome for your recovery and body.