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Diplomate American Board of Plastic Surgery, Diplomate American Board of Surgery

General Surgery, Reconstructive Surgery, Aesthetic Surgery, Plastic and Hand Surgery

Facial Feminization Surgery

Post-Operative Instructions

Overview

Facial feminization is a significant surgical procedure for anyone, regardless of your age or health condition, and therefore should not be taken lightly. This is why it is important to pay close attention to the post-op care instructions provided by your surgeon. In fact, your expectations for recovery from facial feminization surgery should be the same as you would expect from any type of major surgery.

Expectations

The final results of your facial feminization procedure(s) will not be fully apparent until your body has fully recovered and healed from surgery. Recovery timelines are generally specific to the particular set of FFS procedures included in your surgery but may be impacted by your health, age, or other circumstances such as the number and extent of the procedures being undertaken.

Recovery

Ultimately, everyone heals at various pace and patients must understand that full results may not be apparent until the healing process is fully complete. Depending on your specific procedures and circumstances, you can realistically expect a window of 6-12 months to see the optimum results of your facial feminization surgery.

Procedures Included in Facial Feminization Surgery

You can expect your facial feminization surgery to typically include at least three or more of the following procedures:

- Hairline Lowering Surgery
- Forehead Reduction and Contouring Surgery
- Brow Lift (Forehead Lift)
- Rhinoplasty (Nose job)
- Cheek Enhancement (Augmentation & Reduction)
- Lip Lift and Lip Filling
- Chin Recontouring (Genioplasty)
- Jaw Contouring (Reshaping or Tapering)
- Adam's Apple Reduction (Tracheal Shave)
- Feminizing Earlobe Reduction

Your surgeon will recommend what is best for you but, health permitting, we usually recommend that many FFS procedures be completed during the single, long-format surgical session. Typically your time in the operating room will last anywhere from 4 – 10 hours depending on the specific procedures to be performed.



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Day One: The First 24-48 Hours

- For most FFS patients the first 24-48 hours of recovery can be the most challenging. Not in any small part because of the general anesthetic in your system. First, make sure that you're feeling warm and comfortable and if you experience prolonged nausea from the anesthesia your nurse can administer medication that will alleviate this.
- As the anesthetic begins to wear off, your face may feel tight, swollen, and mildly tender. While resting, we highly recommend using at least four standard-size pillows so that you are not lying flat on your back. Sleep with your head elevated at approximately a 45-degree angle the first two weeks so that your head is above your heart. This angle will help to reduce any swelling.
- Expect that the degree and location of swelling will change daily. It may also 'migrate' depending on which side you're resting on, so don't feel alarmed if your swelling seems more pronounced on one side than the other, it's quite normal for it to be asymmetrical in nature.
- During this initial post-op period, we recommend increasing your activity and circulation as much as is comfortable for you because doing so will assist in your recovery and will ultimately shorten the healing period. Get out of bed and move around your home or accommodation but not to such an extent that you overly exert yourself. In fact, walking as much as you can help to reduce swelling as you speed up your circulation. We recommend walking at least 1-2 hours a day, or as much as you can tolerate. As your energy levels rise and return to normal you should increase your movement.
- We will place a light bandage around your face to minimize swelling and bruising. We will also place small drainage tubes where needed to drain excess fluid. Most patients only experience mild pain due to steps we take before your surgery. You will be prescribed non-narcotic, or over-the-counter painkillers such as Tylenol to reduce pain and swelling and to promote faster recovery time with less discomfort.
- You may have difficulty talking and eating comfortably if you have had fat grafting performed on your lips, jaw surgery, or a genioplasty because of the surgery on your lips and mouth area.

The First Week after FFS

- Overall, the biggest challenge faced by many FFS patients at this time is a psychological one. The natural healing process takes time and you may feel impatient to get your bandage off and get on with your life. This can be exacerbated by being out of your normal schedule and needing to take it easy. It is important to remember at this point that the benefits of your surgery will not be fully apparent for another 6-12 months. Ultimately, during the healing process patience is a virtue.
- All of our FFS patients are on a liquid diet for the first 10 days at least. We will provide you with liquid diet suggestions as part of your pre-surgical consultation. The overarching guidance is that you refrain from chewing on anything. With that in mind you may eat pureed foods such as creamy mashed potato or pureed vegetables.
- If you have had feminizing rhinoplasty (nose job) you may find difficulty and discomfort breathing through your nose. Expect the level of discomfort to be similar to having a blocked nose in the course of



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a typical head cold. If you are having difficulty swallowing pills we recommend that you crush them and swallow as part of your liquid diet.

- Facial swelling and bruising may increase slightly in the next few days after surgery. This is normal and should peak after about four to five days before subsiding during the second week. Expect to experience temporary bumps, bulges, mild asymmetries, along with feelings of tingling and numbness. Do not be alarmed. This is a natural part of the healing process. Your surgeon can address any concerns you may have during your follow up visit.
- It is also normal at this time to begin feeling itching sensations in your incisions. This is part of the healing process and can be mitigated by following the provided post-operative care instructions.

Second and Third Weeks after FFS

- Approximately after 2-3 weeks most of the swelling will have dissipated and you should be able to wear light makeup. However, you may still have some mild bruising and swelling around the eyes or other areas of your face.
- You should continue to limit your physical behavior to very non-exertive activities but we recommend at least 2 hours of walking a day or more depending on your energy level. Do not do any sort of heavy exercise or sweaty workout such as running or going to the gym. We can provide you with useful tips for applying light, post-op friendly makeup to address any concerns about residual bruising.
- By the end of three weeks, visible scarring should be greatly reduced. Mild itching and numbness are not unusual and in some areas of the face numbness may persist up to 1-2 years but will eventually subside. Any bruises from surgery should be completely healed by this time and any swelling will be improved but may still noticeable in some areas.

One Month after FFS

- After one month it should not be apparent that you have undergone surgery. Nearly all of your bruising should be gone but you may still experience swelling and itchiness in some areas. Although your incisions will still appear pink in color they will be mostly healed. The pinkness is a natural part of the healing process and may take a few months to fade. Direct sunlight is to be avoided. Regardless of potential exposure, we recommend applying sun screen to all skin incisions for 1 year.
- Although you should be able to resume all your normal activities we strongly advise against any heavy exercise until the sixth-week post-op visit.
- If you have had scalp advancement surgery, it's important to note that approximately 10% of FFS patients may experience some form of mild "shock hair loss". This is a condition where hair may fall out along a one-inch-wide band along an incision in the scalp. Rest assured that this hair will always grow back but may take 6-9 months to do so. We recommend using Rogaine (Minoxidil) or Platelet Rich Plasma as a treatment.



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6-12 Months Post-Op

It's important to have realistic expectations because healing from facial feminization is a long process. The final outcome of your FFS will become fully evident over the next 6-12 months. Typically it takes this amount of time for your FFS surgery to fully heal and "settle" into its optimum result. Over the coming months, you may be able to see the subtle shifts in your appearance as your surgical procedures heal and these final results become apparent.

Possible Problems/Emergency

If you develop any symptoms such as fevers with temperature greater than 101.5 F, chills, persistent nausea and vomiting, inability to urinate, severe pain not controlled with medications, pus drainage from the wound site, or for any acute problems or illnesses, please contact our office at 714-839-8000 between the hours of 9AM-6PM on Monday-Thursday and 9AM-1PM on Friday; or you may reach us at 714-860-3588 after hours.

If you are unable to reach your surgeon or a member of his staff, go to the Emergency Room closest to you.

References:

Deschamps-Braly Clinic. (2020). Facial feminization: Recovery timeline. Retrieved from <https://drzubowski.com/post-operative-care-fat-injections/>