

# BMI Criteria for Surgery

## Background

There are many concerns, some medically valid and some unfounded, revolving around one's weight and undergoing affirmation surgery. At the Gender Confirmation Center, our team is continually reviewing medical data in our efforts to provide up-to-date safe practice guidelines.

Gender surgeries differ in degree of complexity, need for the duration of full anesthesia, and limitations in anatomical variations. Certain standard criteria must be met in order to proceed with a specific procedure. These include being in the most optimal health despite any existing comorbidities, which may include diabetes, heart or kidney disease, and obesity.

Weight in itself is not the sole restrictive factor in determining one's eligibility for a particular procedure. Decisions are always made in light of you as a whole and certainly, it is not a point to be dismissed whether one's weight is "too high" or "too low." BMI (Body Mass Index) is often brought up in this conversation. The original intention of this metric was never to assess one's general health status. It is calculated as weight divided by height and based on the result a person is assigned this BMI number and a label as a category. However, even the CDC agrees that BMI in itself does not necessarily correlate with one's health status or even level of obesity. Providers must consider a broader picture in assessing a patient's health and better determinants are more physiologic parameters like, for example, vital signs. Age, medical conditions, and of course lifestyle seem to play a more important role in a person's health status.

## At the Gender Confirmation Center

Every single patient is evaluated as an individual, and surgical care is customized to their desired procedure. We must recognize that gender surgery is a broad and complex field so each category of surgery will have its own specific criteria when it comes to readiness for surgery (i.e. hair removal, diagnostic tests and imaging, and of course, weight).

Here is a general overview of recommended weight expectations per category of affirming surgeries. It is important to note that body composition rather than the weight itself is a major determinant. BMI does not reflect this point.



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## Top Surgeries and Facial Surgeries

No strict limitations. However, an overnight stay or surgery in a hospital (vs surgery center) may be required due to coexisting comorbidities.

## Body Contouring

Limitations are not related to whether one may undergo surgery. Rather, the decision as to one's qualifications for these procedures has more to do with accomplishing and achieving satisfactory and realistic aesthetic results. Body contouring surgery is not without risk and as a general rule, body contouring above a BMI of 32 might have limited or minimal results. One should speak with our surgeons about goals and surgical options for a given body type.

## Bottom Surgeries

This category of procedures is where weight is a much stronger consideration. Therefore, weight limits are set by each surgeon but note that there is not a single goal weight or BMI number. It is more of a range of weight. As mentioned above, body composition and fat distribution are the main determinants so a careful physical exam is required to accurately assess risk and eligibility for surgery.

The following procedures fall into this category:

- Microsurgical phalloplasties: <35
- ALT (anterolateral thigh) phalloplasties: <25
- Vaginoplasty: <40
- Vulvoplasty: <50
- Metoidioplasty with urethral lengthening (NOT simple metoidioplasty): <40
- Simple metoidioplasty and groin flap phalloplasties: <50

Our expert surgeons aim to provide an elevated level of care through each individual's journey through surgical affirmation with compassion, empathy, kindness, and respect. We will do our best to educate and guide you. We may refer you to other allied health services to help meet your goals.

## References

Jackson-Gibson, Adele. "Why We're Saying Goodbye to BMI." Prevention, June 2022.

Castro-Sloboda, Giselle. "Why the Same Weight Looks Different on Everyone." CNET. June 2022.



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