

## **Transgender Binders FTM**

### **THE POSSIBLE EFFECTS OF WEARING A BINDER-**

A typical binder is not only very tight, but it is usually made of durable nylon and spandex, making them notoriously uncomfortable to wear.

Binding (especially if done improperly) has the potential to hurt you, both short and long term. Using tape and certain types of bandages, such as an Ace bandage, can quickly become a health hazard with the potential to cause scarring to your skin, hurt your mobility, and cause fluid build-up in lungs or even broken ribs. An Ace bandage is very dangerous because it becomes tighter the more you breathe.

Finding the right size binder is crucial for both your health and comfort. Binders are already tight so don't opt for a smaller size just because you think it will be more effective in concealing your chest. If someone is wearing a binder that is one or two sizes too small, which people commonly do, they're going to be more likely to have problems.

If this is your first binder, wearing it might take some getting used to. If you experience itchiness, back pain, or general discomfort, feel free to take it off, even if it's only for a few minutes. Once again, the rule of thumb is to always listen to your body. Ending the day with some deep breathing exercises and stretches can also help the body restore itself after being bound all day long.

Binders normally come in two styles: short tri-tops and full length, which extend over the stomach. There are also strapless options, which may seem appealing to those who prefer strapless tops. However, without the support offered by straps, the strapless binders can increase the risk of scarring or aching in the same way an Ace bandage might. This strapless version also doesn't distribute the pressure evenly and it folds down so one has to adjust more often, and can create a cleavage problem since it doesn't go up as high. It works better for someone starting with a very small chest size.

Correct terminology for FTM is to use chest instead of breast.

### **SOLUTIONS -**

If one must choose to wear a binder, ease into how many hours a day it is worn. An Ace Bandage is very dangerous and shouldn't be considered. Find the right size and choose the shorter version so as not to bind the organs in the abdomen.

## **Caiden's experiences –**

He came out at Christmas 2013 in his first semester of college. Since he had a larger chest (36C cup), he started with an Ace bandage for 2 weeks while waiting for a binder. An Ace bandage is an unsafe binding method and should not be used because it gets tighter as the day goes on. This bandage caused Caiden to have trouble breathing, chaffing and bleeding (which is caused by sweating if a cloth wasn't underneath), bruised ribs, and in general a lot of pain. At the time, there was not enough information online or accessibility to buy a proper binder. One couldn't just go to the store and buy one, so they would opt for an Ace bandage. There is even a TV show called *Degrassi*, where a character is wearing an Ace bandage instead of a binder, and this sends the wrong message to young adults who do not know the difference. Education is key.

Binders give better results in regards to how flat a person's chest appears, but is not quite as damaging. In January 2014, he started using a binder that was a long tank top called the Underworks brand and cost about \$30-\$50. The material consisted of 70% nylon and 30% spandex, with a double layer of compression fabric in front and a single layer in back. This model was also good for swimming. After one week, he cut the tank top shorter because it just kept rolling up, and more importantly, it was not as tight around his mid section and organs, and therefore a bit more comfortable. By shortening the binder, the chaffing was less all the way down the sides of the garment and his breath became lower.

His typical problems were trouble breathing, chaffing, bleeding, bruised ribs, red marks from the binder seams that are tough and tight, posture issues from hunching shoulders forward, and a respiratory infection from fluid build up in the lungs. In fact, it is suggested that when one takes the binder off, that they cough to loosen up the fluid in the lungs. If not, they will most likely have some coughing fits anyway. Be aware that some binders ordered online that are made in Asian countries are too small even in size XL.

When Caiden had the infection, he couldn't bind himself, but he was able to get a doctor's note so that he did not have to go into work. Most websites recommend wearing the binder for no more than 8 hours, depending on the website, but Caiden wore his for 16 hours a day and never took it off, even for a few minutes to relieve discomfort. He did take it off to sleep, which is crucial for anyone binding. If the binder is not removed for sleep, one will permanently cause damage, and become highly susceptible to breaking ribs.

At this time, Caiden was living as a male with many roommates in college, and even though they all knew of his situation, he was not comfortable taking his binder off. This brings up the question of someone choosing mental health vs. physical health.

The next binder Caiden bought was not available until 2015 called GC2B made by Trans Men. He started wearing it in the summer of 2015. This is a much better binder that is a short tank that goes to about a ½ inch above the belly button. It is made of spandex and cotton and the compression material is now only in front instead of also in the back. He can now breathe much better in his lungs.

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