

FTM Passing Tips

(Last updated June 2, 2004) by Andy and many others

Intro and Disclaimer

Please keep in mind that these tips are just guidelines based on what has worked for myself and others - with experimentation, you can find out what works best for you and fits your personal style. The listing of a product here is not intended as a positive or negative endorsement of that product.

Hair

Hair is the most important place to start. Go to a barber's if you already feel comfortable trying one - if you don't, find a gay or gay-friendly hair stylist who's willing to help you look as masculine as possible. A lot of guys keep going to the person who cut their hair "before" - don't, especially if they perceived you as a lesbian. Even if you're not passing yet, get a new barber or stylist who'll help you to look male.

Go for a short-back-n'-sides cut, but avoid getting an all-over crewcut or "punk" style, as these are often sported by the butch lesbians who you are trying to distinguish yourself from. All-over crewcuts are also problematic because they emphasize the shape and size of one's skull and are therefore feminizing (look at Sinead O' Connor) - you've got to leave something on top. Ask for a "traditional men's cut" or a "traditional boys' cut," or tell them that you're in a play or going to a costume party and you need to look like a guy. You can take in a photo of a haircut you like, or you can browse the Buzztown Barber Shop and ask for a haircut by name.

Comb the top of your hair back or to the side. As any MTF can tell you, bangs are feminizing - women and kids tend to have them, but men don't. Use gel or mousse if your hair won't stay in place.

Sideburns: You know those Liza Minnelli-esque "points" which grow just in front of the ears of women with short hair? Men don't have them, so cut them off straight across with a good pair of scissors. Then use a razor to square off your sideburns - start from the upper point where your ear meets your head and then go straight down.

Shaving: Many women have light-colored "peach fuzz," but men don't, so shave it off. Again, use a good razor and shaving cream, followed by aftershave. Shave your sideburns every day and your whole face as often as needed. Make sure you also shave your upper lip - a light mustache is actually far more likely to give you away than to help you pass.

Fake Stubble/Facial Hair: Although really convincing fake facial hair from a theater or costume supplier might help you pass, it is not recommended. It's very difficult to explain where that full mustache suddenly sprouted from and even more difficult to remember who's seen you wearing it and who hasn't.

Rogaine, supplements, herbals, etc.: Do NOT use Rogaine on your face - it won't work, and there could be serious side effects. It's designed

to work only on peoples' heads. Supplements and herbal hormones are also potentially dangerous and could even give you liver damage. The only safe and effective way to lower your voice, masculinize your body, and grow facial hair is to take testosterone under the care of a doctor. Any other way is ineffective and potentially hazardous to your health.

Body

Even if you are not on hormones, bodybuilding either in a gym or at home can make a difference in getting your body to take on a more male shape. Before beginning any workout program, make sure you are healthy enough to do so, and make sure that you learn the correct way to do the exercises so as to avoid injury. Trans-Health.com has helpful articles on fitness, and Run2Far.com provides trans-friendly personal training.

Chest

While a flatter chest is an important part of presenting as male, it is important to know that binding too tightly and too long is not good for you. Make sure you give yourself breaks from binding, and try to avoid methods which cause back or rib pain, restrict breathing, or cause skin problems.

You don't necessarily need to bind perfectly flat to pass, since how tightly you need to bind depends partly on what you're planning to wear. If you are wearing layers (T-shirt with woven shirt on top) and/or woven, baggy fabrics such as button-down shirts, you will need to bind less tightly in order to appear flat than you would under tighter, knit clothing such as T-shirts. If you need a break from tighter binding methods, you might want to consider wearing woven shirts more often than knit ones.

Binding with with tape is not recommended - I've heard of one guy who managed to pull off a layer of skin at the end of the day. Also not recommend are Ace bandages. Although they can really flatten you out, they can also cause pain, restrict breathing, and cut into your sides. They also tend to slip down easily.

There are a number of better binding options available, and what will work best for you depends on your size and build. Keep in mind that commercial products designed for non-trans men may not come in sizes small enough to accommodate smaller guys. Finally, many binding options are more comfortable if you apply talc or Gold Bond Medicated Powder before putting them on:

For those wishing to avoid binding during the summer comes this suggestion from the Netherlands:

"Wear a muscle-shirt or a T-shirt (a muscle-shirt, leaving your biceps and deltoids uncovered, looks nicer IMO), preferably not too loose, tucked in. Over that, wear a singlet (which I think [Americans] call a vest or tank top); make sure it's way way way oversized and not made from a stretchy material, preferably with a print or application at the front. It doesn't really bind, but for those of us who are not too large it sure beats hot sweaty tight uncomfortable binders! Also, if the vest has large armholes and is made from a loosely-knit or mesh-like material it's not much warmer than one layer of clothes."

You can make a homemade binder made using lycra cycling shorts or control top nylons (yes, nylons). The following method can be used by itself or to help keep a neoprene or elastic binder in place. Cut both legs off the shorts or nylons, and then carefully cut the crotch area out of the middle, making sure you leave the fabric around it intact. Cut the waist-band off too if you find that it cuts into you too much (it will ride up more without the waistband, though). Then turn the whole thing upside down - your arms should go through the leg holes, your head should go through the hole in the crotch area, and the rest (the waist area) should go down over your chest. Position your breasts down and out as much as possible. Hand wash the nylons with mild soap, line dry.

Another good option is a tight sports bra, available at any athletic wear store. These are very comfortable and work well if you're a "B" or smaller. Champion make good ones.

While the average sports bra doesn't have enough lycra (about 11%) to hold in larger chests, Title Nine Sports offers a product called The Frog Bra (Item #310900) which is made of 32% lycra and promises "maximum support and compression." It costs \$29 (2 for \$56), and from what I've heard it works:

Title 9 Sports
800-342-4448
<http://www.title9sports.com>

The Enell sports bra company custom-makes a \$60 product called "The Bro" which is especially designed to provide maximum compression for men with gynecomastia (enlarged breasts). For more information, contact Enell at:

Enell Sports Bra
800-828-7661
info@enell.com
<http://www.enell.com>

Under Armour's Sleeveless T-shirts (\$23.99) and Long Tanks (\$24.99) are designed to wear under football and hockey pads, but they also make good binders for FTMs. Their products are available in most sporting goods stores, so you can try them on first. To buy online or find a retailer near you, go to:
<http://www.underarmour.com>

Underworks offers a variety of products. They are trans-friendly, and if you call and let them know that you're FTM (as opposed to a non-trans guy with gynecomastia), they will help you decide which one would work best for you. Calling first is important, since they tend to change their sizing occasionally. Underworks products include the new Tri-Top Chest Binder, which has been getting rave reviews from FTMs. Please note that the Tri-Top Binder does not look at all like the illustration on the web page but is more like a half-length version of the Double Front Compression Shirt.

- Body Shirt (\$17.99, 3 for \$48.99, 6 for \$89.99)
- Tri-Top Chest Binder (\$29.99, 3 for 84.99, 6 for \$159.99)
- Double Front Compression Shirt (\$36.99, 3 for \$104.99)

- Power Compression Vest (\$36.99, 3 for \$104.99)
- Cotton Spandex Support Tank (\$26.99)

Note: Some longer binders tend to "roll up" on some guys. To prevent this from happening, either fold the bottom half back so it "doubles up" (which also provides extra compression), or sew a wide enough strip of fabric to the bottom edge of the binder to make it long enough to tuck into your trousers (see illustration).

Underworks

Voice: (800) 242-4224, 12-6 PM EST

Int'l: (305) 668-5151

The Loving Comfort Breast Binder from CMO Incorporated costs about \$19 and comes highly-recommended by some larger guys. This product was originally made to stop milk production in nursing mothers, but FTMs report that it also does a great job of binding and is very breathable and comfortable.

International Male's Undergear catalog lists two products for out-of-shape non-trans men: the cotton/poly/lycra Body Trimmer (\$24), and the nylon and spandex Body Shaper (\$22). Because these products are designed for gut control, however, they may not be substantial enough up top for some guys.

International Male

call 800-293-9333 for print catalogue

Taiwan's T Kingdom™ offers binders which are designed to be "comfortable" and "as easy to put on as any shirt" and to "look good under other clothes." There are eight different models (a reader describes the 1700 as "fab"), and prices range from about \$23 US dollars to about \$61 US dollars. See their first time buyer's guide to determine which model will work for you. Please note that their products tend to be sized small, so you may need to go up several sizes from what you normally wear. (Note - prices are listed in Taiwan Dollars and will look alarming if you don't convert them: <http://www.x-rates.com/calculator.html>)

For highly effective (they can be even be worn with T-shirts) latex undershirts, try Mr. S Leather. Always remember to apply talc or Gold Bond Medicated Powder underneath these.

Mr. S Leather

800-746-7677

<http://www.mr-s-leather-fetters.com>

Morris Designs offers several products, which I hear are very comfortable and effective. The male Gynecomastia Vest, Gynecomastia Vest - No Velcro, Gynecomastia Tee Shirt Vest, and Zippered Male Vest all come in sizes SX, S, M, L, and XL and cost \$52.

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Morris Designs
800-766-5578 (toll free)
757-463-9400 (direct and international)
<http://www.morrisdesigns.com>

Some guys report success with Neoprene back braces and waist trimmers, which they trim to the appropriate size. They are available online and at sporting good stores and are less sweaty if worn over a T-shirt. For more information on modifying and using neoprene back braces as effective binders,

Many drug stores and medical supply stores sell abdominal binders, which some guys have had great success with. Elastic rib belts are also available, but they tend to be less comfortable and effective than abdominal binders. For more on abdominal binders, [click here](#). To order abdominal binders, try:

- Alpha Medical Products Inc. (\$27.99)
- Morris Designs Dale Binder (\$34-\$44, depending on size)
- Tetra Medical Supply (don't list prices)

Swimming

You don't necessarily have to give up swimming prior to chest surgery. Many guys have been able to swim successfully by wearing a rash guard shirt (used for surfing) over a binder. Rash guards are available online and from surf shops such as Quiksilver. If you're concerned about sunlight, Coolibar makes rash shirts which block 98% of UV rays and come sizes XS to XXL.

One reader reports swimming while wearing a "football jersey (mesh shirt w/holes) over a binder top that didn't bind too tight." Daniel recommends taking some cycling shorts, cutting the crotch out, and then turning them upside-down and putting your arms through the legs holes, your head through the cut-out crotch, and then the main part around your chest before covering it with a rash guard shirt (see above).

Clothes

Once you've bound, you need the right shirt. In the cooler months, a plain white crew neck undershirt over your binder and beneath your shirt will help hide your chest, and that triangle of white showing beneath an open collar looks very masculine. For other shirts, knit fabrics often tend to cling too much, while woven ones (such as cotton and cotton blend button-down shirts) "bag" out better and hence help you look flatter. If you send your shirts to the cleaners, a good way to keep them from clinging is to ask for extra starch. Always try silk shirts on first - depending on the cut of the silk, it can either work well for you or cling too much.

As for patterns, busy prints, checks, plaids, or horizontal stripes are good because they distract the eye from the topography beneath them. A vest (waistcoat to you Brits) over your shirt can also help hide your chest.

If you live in a cosmopolitan area where there are a lot of butch lesbians then it's going to be much more difficult for you to pass. One way to help distinguish yourself from them is to dress more

conservatively - you might want to leave the leather motorcycle jacket at home for a while.

Start with an ironed button-down shirt (loose, to help hide your chest), worn with pressed khakis, dress slacks, or neat-looking blue or black jeans. I've also heard that Dickies brand, 100% cotton casual wear shirts work well, especially in hot weather. Eddie Bauer 100% cotton wrinkle resistant shirts are also recommended. In the summer, you can avoid the androgyny of T-shirts and cut-offs by pairing short-sleeved button-down shirts with khaki shorts.

Ties are of course a great way to pass, though there are many situations where you'll look too out-of-place in one. Also, when buying shirts to wear with ties, keep in mind that your neck size will increase once you're on hormones. Here's how to tie a tie.

Make sure your trousers fit low and aren't tight - this helps to hide both your hips and your waist. Pleats can either help hide your hips or emphasize them, so use your judgement. If you do decide to wear pleated trousers, make sure that the pleats lie flat. A dark brown or black leather belt is also a nice, masculine touch. If you're short, avoid double-breasted suits. Don't spend a lot of money on new suits and jackets at this point - you'll bulk out of them once you're on hormones. Instead, find a good used clothing shop to buy them at.

There's also a web site which lists good sources of clothing and shoes for shorter men, including mail order and specialty shops:
<http://www.frugalcorner.com/short.html>

Jewelry: If you're very small-boned, try a 3/4 size men's watch - it looks substantial and masculine without emphasizing how thin your wrists are.

Shoes, Socks, and Slippers

These can be a real problem if you have small feet, although you do save money if you can wear boys' athletic shoes. For dress shoes, the boys' section of a department store can be a good place to look. Famous Footwear and Payless are also good places to shop for both dress and athletic shoes. Boots from Army Navy stores also go down to small sizes. Don't spend too much money on shoes, though - your feet will grow at least a size once you're on hormones.

The shiny (as opposed to "greasy" finish) Dr. Martens Oxfords can make good dress shoes (especially if you can find a pair without the trademark yellow stitching), and they come in sizes as small as a UK 3 (US boys' 4&1/2). They also add about an inch to your height. Bostonian makes really nice dress shoes in sizes as small as a 5, and the Richlee Shoe Company makes shoes with lifts:

Socks: Men tend to wear white socks only with athletic shoes, so stick to dark socks with other shoes. If your feet are too small for men's dress socks, wear boys' size 9-11 socks, and, if you can't find any boys' dress socks you like, the women's ribbed trouser socks at Banana Republic made good dress socks (don't worry, no one will know you're cross-dressed :-). For smaller athletic socks, discount stores sell very inexpensive 10-packs of boys' white socks.

Slippers: Finding smaller slippers that aren't styled for little kids can be even more difficult than finding shoes. Thinsulate Cabin Slippers from Early Winters are comfortable, warm, look great, and come as small as a men's size 5.

Voice

Women tend to use an upward inflection at the end of their sentences, while men tend to speak in more of a monotone.

Mannerisms

Women tend to be less obtrusive, while men tend to take up more space. If you watch commuters on a bus, women tend to sit with their legs crossed and their arms drawn in, and men tend to sit with their legs apart and their arms out.

Handshakes: Make them firm, not like a dead fish. Lock your thumb into the other persons hand, and look them in the eye. Don't pump excessively.

Bathrooms

FTMs are actually fairly fortunate in this area because men are far less observant and social than women - they usually just go in, do their business, and leave. Just march calmly in, use the stall, and march calmly out - if you rush around nervously you'll be far more likely to attract attention. Don't talk to anyone, don't make eye contact, and whatever you do, don't try to look at anyone's dick. Remember, even non-trans men have to sit down sometimes. You do not need to be able to stand and pee in order to pass, but here are some ways to do so (it's best to practice naked in the shower until you get the hang of them). To stand and pee without the help of a device, see: <http://www.restrooms.org/standing.html>

Conclusion

Finally, a very large part of passing is sheer confidence and bravado. If you really believe you're a man (which you are) and project this belief to the rest of the world, it will go a long way towards also convincing others. Any difficult feature you might have (high voice, smooth face, small shoulders, wide hips, lack of height, etc.) is one that some non-trans men have also - there are even non-trans men with enlarged chests (male gynecomastia).

Recommended Reading

The FTM newsletter is available by subscription for \$35.00/yr. (4 issues). Send your name, mailing address, and check or money order to:

FTM International, Inc.
160 14th St.
San Francisco, CA 94103
Phone 415-553-5987
TSTGmen@aol.com
<http://www.ftmi.org/>

Lou Sullivan's Information for the Female to Male Crossdresser and Transsexual has helpful information on everything from passing to surgery. It is currently out of print, but a revised version should be some day be available from:

Ingersoll Gender Center
1812 E. Madison, Suite 106
Seattle WA 98122
[http:// www.ingersollcenter.org](http://www.ingersollcenter.org)

The book Dagger contains a chapter on FTMs and a useful chapter called "Packing, Pissing and Passing." It should be available used from Amazon.

For dealing with paperwork, name changes, etc., Dallas Denny's Identity Management in Transsexualism is very helpful. It is available at the International Foundation for Gender Education's Synchronicity bookstore.

Many more helpful books and other publications are available at the International Foundation for Gender Education's Synchronicity Bookstore:

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<http://www.ifge.org>