



# A Guide to Safe Binding

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**LGBT**  
foundation

# Foreword



People present themselves in different ways, and sometimes people use clothing to alter how their bodies appear to be shaped. We are aware that within and outside of LGBT communities, there are a number of people who prefer to present themselves with a smaller chest than they have. These people can be trans, non-binary, gender-nonconforming, or perhaps none of these. For some people, presenting themselves with a less visible chest is a

slight preference, and for some, it is essential for their wellbeing. Unfortunately, due to lack of information and stigma, it is difficult to access information to safely reduce the appearance of the chest. The growth of the internet has led to some information - and misinformation - being circulated faster, but

still we see a lot of desperate people who bind their chests unsafely because they either don't know what they are doing is unsafe or because they can't afford the safest methods. Many people from our communities that bind their chest who couldn't access safe binding resources told us they have bound unsafely even if they were discouraged from it, and would continue to do so if they were unable access safe binding resources.



*“Getting properly fitted and speaking to someone in person about my concerns made all the difference. When I tried on my binder, I felt my whole body exhale. I’d been holding in a massive amount of tension that I didn’t even realise I was carrying.”*

**Age 25, non-binary/agender person**

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Weighing up between their mental health and potential damage to their chests further down the line, we heard that often people were willing to take the risks. We don’t want people to have to choose between being able to leave their houses and looking after their physical health. We want to encourage dialogue between people who bind their chests, their GPs and their support networks. We want to make sure our communities are presenting themselves in a way that is authentic to them, without harming themselves. We want to encourage environments where they can take breaks from binding where needed, and can discuss with people in their lives why they wish to bind and how they can be supported in doing so in the safest possible ways. We know that the alternative is more unsafe binding in secret, because that’s what communities told us happens every day.

We will continue to support our communities and work towards an environment that allows them to be more open. We compiled this information to help our communities to make safer choices, to help conversations to happen that will create safer, trusting environments, and to show the range of options outside of binding as well.

## We're here if you need us



Promoting  
Safety



Encouraging  
Wellbeing



Achieving  
Equality

## Words we use in this guide

Some ways of thinking about the body might make people feel dysphoric or uncomfortable about themselves. In this guide, we will look to use the term 'chest', as this is more gender-neutral. We will also aim to use other gender-neutral terms whenever possible in the guide. You may wish to describe your body in other ways, and that's okay.

# What is a binder?

A binder is an item of clothing that is used to flatten the appearance of the chest area. There are lots of different kinds of binders, some that are about the same size as a sports bra, some that stretch down to the length of a t-shirt, and even some that are designed for swimming in. Binders are breathable and stretchy, and come in a range of sizes.



*“Chest binding is a revelation, it makes me feel and look like I know I should. It makes me happier, more confident. Makes me walk taller and dress better.”*

**Age 40, trans man**

## Who uses a binder?

Lots of different people may use a binder at different times. Trans and non-binary people who wish to reduce the appearance of their chest may wear them. Some cisgender people wear them because they prefer their bodies to look that way, and they may be used in performance by drag kings. However, there are also many trans men and non-binary people who prefer not to wear one, or don't experience dysphoria from their chest, and that's okay. Choosing not to wear a binder does not make your identity any less valid.

## What to expect from a good binder

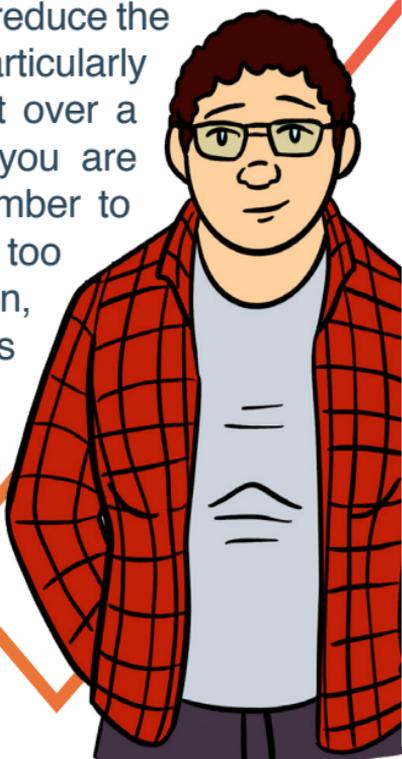
- ✓ Made of breathable material
- ✓ Are not strapless
- ✓ Are comfortable and don't scratch the skin
- ✓ Do not have hook-and-eye fixtures, or elastic straps around the sides
- ✓ Will be one piece, not sewn inside a shirt or top
- ✓ Will likely stretch out over time
- ✓ Should be hand-washed where possible
- ✓ Often made of nylon spandex and cotton

# Alternatives to binding

While binding might feel like your only option, there are many different ways to reduce the appearance of the chest. These alternatives might be something to consider instead of binding, particularly if you're struggling to take breaks from binding or if you find binding too uncomfortable. Remember, your identity is still just as valid even if you don't bind.

Wearing multiple layers can reduce the appearance of your chest. Particularly the use of a button-up shirt over a t-shirt can be effective. If you are using a lot of layers, remember to stay hydrated and if you get too hot, shed layers when you can, or at least roll up your sleeves or undo outer clothes.

Compression sports bras can be a good alternative to binding, particularly if you are looking to do exercise.



*“I try not to bind when I’m at home. One thing that helps with that is wearing pyjamas a lot - for some reason I find it easier to not bind when I’m at home if I’m wearing a pyjama top than a t-shirt!”*

### **Age 38, non-binary trans man**

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There are other sports compression wear that you can purchase to flatten the chest and other areas of your body if you wish to, but don’t be tempted to wear clothes that are too small, as this will quickly become uncomfortable.

Sleeveless gilet jackets are padded in a way that the body shape is flattened a lot. You can look to get one a size bigger to reduce the appearance of the chest, and getting a sleeveless one can help keep you cooler.

Zip-up jackets can be good when it isn’t too hot to wear, or in warm weather, wear loose-fitted, thin button-up shirts or t-shirts.

You can use waistcoats to give the appearance of a flatter chest, if they are fitted correctly. Darker clothes are better to make lumps and curves less visible.

## What to avoid



If you are looking to quickly get a flat appearance to your chest, it can be tempting to follow misleading information and guidance online. Binding incorrectly can do damage to your body, and we would recommend avoiding using alternative ways to restrict your chest.

Avoid bandages, ace bandages, duct tape, or sports tape. None of these things are made to have enough stretch in them for breathing, and can lead to bruised or damaged ribs, trouble breathing, and damaged or scarred tissue in the case of tape.

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*“For those of you looking into starting binding, please make sure you read other people’s experiences online and do your research. Binders aren’t cheap but I can assure you that a proper binder is better for your body than any cheap or DIY alternatives.”*

**Age 22, Salford**

While safe binders are often expensive, avoid cheap items of clothing that pose as binders online. They are quickly recognisable online as they typically sell very cheaply, and are generally sewn into the inside of a tank top and/or fasten with hook-and-eye mechanisms. They are often poorly made and don't have the same stretch for breathing as real binders. They tend to have little breathability for your skin, which can lead to skin irritation and can generally cause a great deal of damage to the tissue in your chest if continuously used.



*“I managed to get a couple of cheap binders from eBay [...] I wore those frequently for at least two years but they would leave painful marks and indents in my skin if I wore them for more than a few hours. [...] I then came across GC2B. I found those binders were incredibly comfortable, more so than wearing bras, so would wear those binders more often.”*

## **Age 22, Greater Manchester**



Avoid anything that tries to sell itself as a “strapless binder” - they do not offer the correct support to remain in place, and will generally be far too tight.

Avoid using post-surgery compression vests, as these are not designed for binding chests in this way, and will generally be either too tight or ill-fitting.

# If you're experiencing a lot of dysphoria

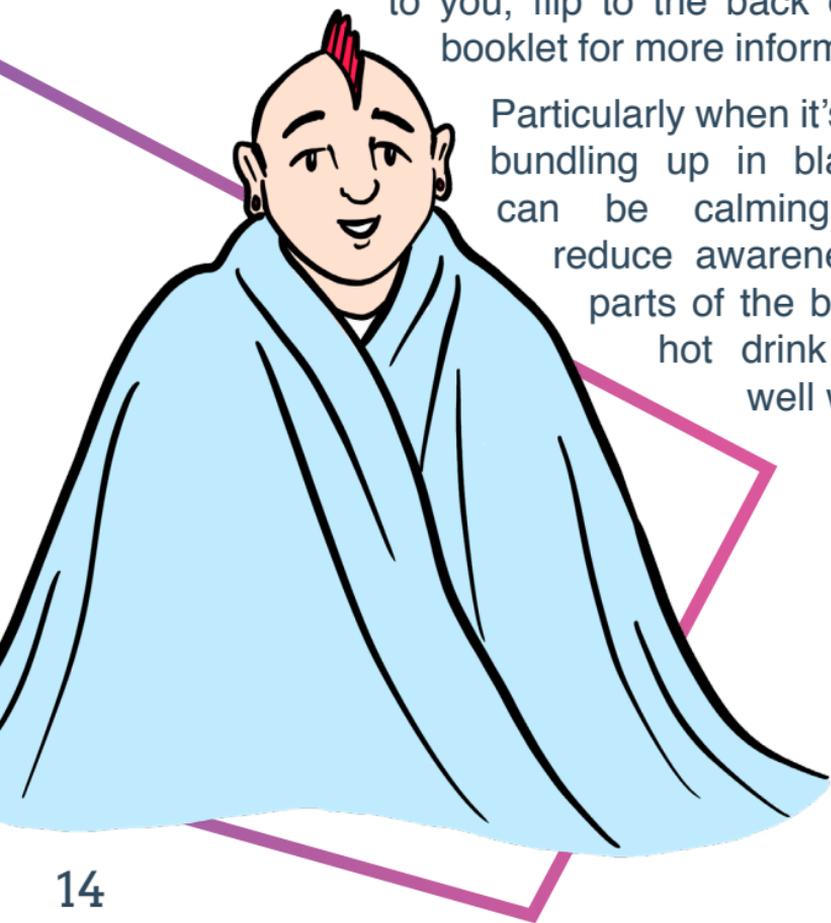
Dysphoria can be different for everyone. Some people do not experience any dysphoria. Others only experience dysphoria with their body, or certain parts of their body. On the other hand, others will only experience it if someone misgenders them. Some may experience a combination of body related and social dysphoria. If you are experiencing a lot of dysphoria, it can feel difficult to avoid binding if you need to, or avoid unsafe binding. Here are some top tips for dealing with dysphoria:

Talk to your GP. It is important to keep your GP informed about your health. If you wish to find a GP in Greater Manchester trained in LGBT awareness, you can contact our Pride in Practice team. To find out more, visit: [lgbt.foundation/pip](https://lgbt.foundation/pip)



Talk to someone who can validate your identity. If you have a friend or family member in your life that supports you, talk to them about how you're feeling. If you don't feel like opening up to them, it can also be helpful to just have a conversation knowing they see you as you. If you want to reach out to helplines or meet others who might have similar experiences to you, flip to the back of this booklet for more information.

Particularly when it's cold, bundling up in blankets can be calming and reduce awareness of parts of the body. A hot drink goes well with it!



Wear clothes that make you feel good. Sometimes just seeing yourself in clothes and outfits that express who you are can help to alleviate some dysphoria. This might not always be the case if you don't want to see yourself, but at least comfortable, soft and sometimes loose or oversized clothing can be useful in making you more comfortable. Don't feel you have to conform to a certain way of looking to be valid if it doesn't make you feel comfortable.

Try to meet up with people who "get it". It might take a while, but you may gradually find you don't feel uncomfortable about not binding around certain people. This will help you to take breaks and still receive validation in your gender. Flip to the back of the booklet to find out more about where you could meet others.

Keep a blog or diary. Sometimes just getting your thoughts and feelings down on paper or typed out can help to make them feel concrete and easier to manage. Try to balance out your diary or blog with positive thoughts and feelings from other times to give you something to look back on when times get tough.

*“I don’t feel as intensely about binding if I’m only going to be seeing people who know I’m non-binary and who I know fully accept me and my gender identity”*

**Age 25,  
non-binary/agender person**

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Do something to distract yourself that makes you happy. If you don’t feel you can leave the house to go for a walk, perhaps do some kind of art, or write something. Read, listen to a podcast or music, play a video game, meditate, play with a pet, play an instrument, anything that can distract you or make you feel calm.

Exercise. Even just stretches or simple exercises in your room can sometimes get endorphins flowing and make you feel better. You will need to ideally not be binding for exercise, so if you enjoy exercise, this could be a good reason to not bind for a bit, and switch to a sports bra or other alternative.

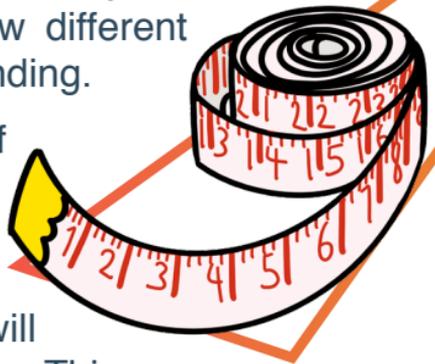


# What to consider before binding

While if you bind safely you may experience very limited discomfort, you may need to have a think about a few different things before you start binding.

Do you experience a lot of eczema or skin irritation? Because binders sit close to your skin, even the most breathable ones will likely make you sweat more. This can cause skin irritation, rashes, and eczema flare-up if not treated correctly. You can limit this by wearing an undershirt underneath the binder, or using talcum powder around the area it tends to happen. If it is persistent, consider binding for less time and/or not binding in hot weather or environments, and talk to your GP.

Take measurements. You should always use the website of the supplier of the binder for guidance on how to measure yourself for their particular binder. If in doubt, always go a size up! If you are receiving a binder from a binder



*“I can’t stress enough how important it is to do research before you purchase a binder as my previous one injured my back but this was because it was not designed specifically for binding and I did not follow the safety guide lines.”*

### **Anonymous**

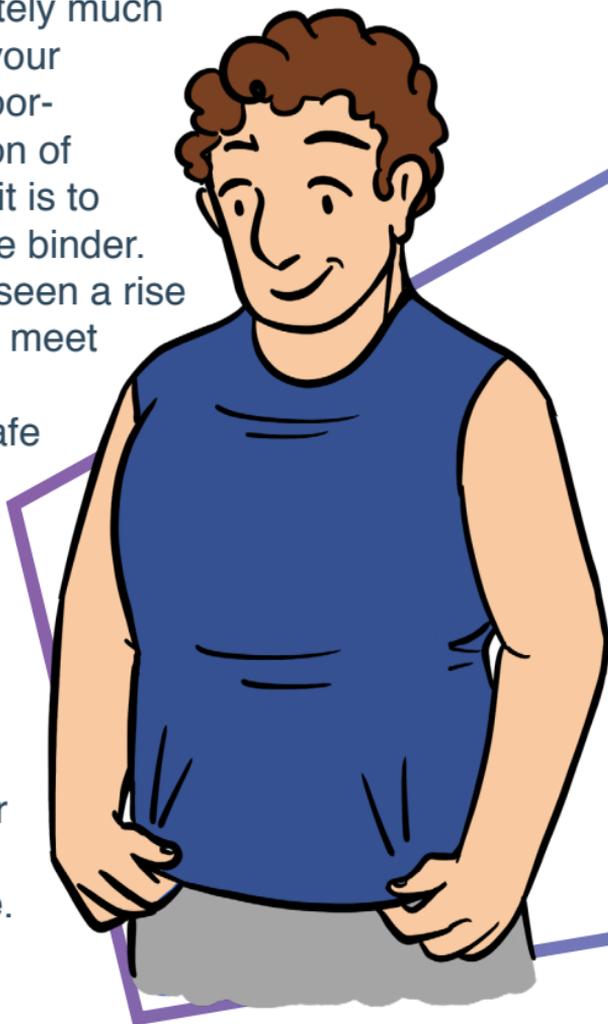
exchange, ask them if they know the make of the binder they are sending you so you can take measurements beforehand.

Your body may change over time. For example, if you decide to access hormone blockers and/or testosterone, you may experience a change in fat distribution and muscle mass, or it may change generally for other reasons. You may need to consider re-measuring yourself for your binder and being mindful of whether your binder is still comfortable to make sure you are still binding safely.

Talk to people in your life about your choice to bind if you feel safe and able to. This will help people to understand what it is, why you’re doing it, and how they can support you. It may also help you not to wear your binder around them if you need to take a break.

# Where to get a binder/not get a binder

It is unfortunately much easier to get your hands on a poor-quality imitation of a binder than it is to get a real, safe binder. We've luckily seen a rise in suppliers to meet the increased demand for safe binders, but people are still falling into the trap of purchasing cheap binders out of desperation or not knowing they're unsafe.



*“When I first purchased a binder it was a cheap one online that had clasps on the side and I did not research proper binders before I purchased this particular one. At first this binder was amazing, it gave me gender euphoria and I wore it pretty much every single day. However, I soon learnt that there were safety guide lines that should be followed.”*

### **Anonymous**

**Spectrum Outfitters** are a UK-based company that produces binders. They are good quality, and as they are in the UK, you will avoid high postage and customs charges when ordering them. They occasionally have sales and offers throughout the year.

**GC2B** is one of the most popular brands. They have similar binder styles to Spectrum Outfitters, however they are based in the US, which means you may be hit by surprise customs charges if you order them from the UK.



There are many other providers globally, and you may hear of people frequently mentioning other providers. A good starting point is to check if the company is supplying the binders specifically for trans people, or if they are supposed to be for other purposes, for example post-surgery compression vests. These may not have been designed with your body shape in mind, and may not bind correctly or safely.

There may be binder exchange schemes in your area or country that look to re-distribute safe binders from those who no longer need them to those who are unable to afford or acquire safe binders.

It is always best to measure yourself using guidance of the original supplier of the binder's website. Try to clarify with the people running the scheme what brand the binder is.

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*“The only type I wore were GC2B as I felt they had best reviews and my personal experience with them was fine. Although they didn't flatten my chest completely I felt way more confident when wearing one.”*

**Age 22, Greater Manchester**



# How to put on a binder

There are a few different ways to put on a binder depending on your preference and body shape. You may find it easiest to slip it on over your head and then push your arms through the holes, but this might be difficult for you, especially on your first try.

Another way is to step into the binder. Turn the binder inside out and upside down, and step into it. Pull what would be the bottom of the binder up to about your belt line, with it still upside down and inside out. Use the sleeves to pull the binder up to your shoulders.

You should then be able to put your arms through the armholes and adjust the binder to your comfort. You may find it difficult to do this method however, and you may find it easier to go over the top of your head.

If you still are having difficulty, you may find it best to look to get a size up.

# How to take off a binder

It might be tempting to try to take your arms out first to push your way out, but you may end up with your arms stuck! Cross your arms to hold the bottom of the binder on either side of your chest (or torso if you are wearing a full-length binder). Pull it up over your shoulders and it should turn inside-out and slip off up your arms. Some people prefer to lift the front of the binder as far as they can, then pull it off from the back and over their head like a t-shirt. Wearing a thin t-shirt under the binder can help you to remove the binder when you need to.



# When to take off a binder

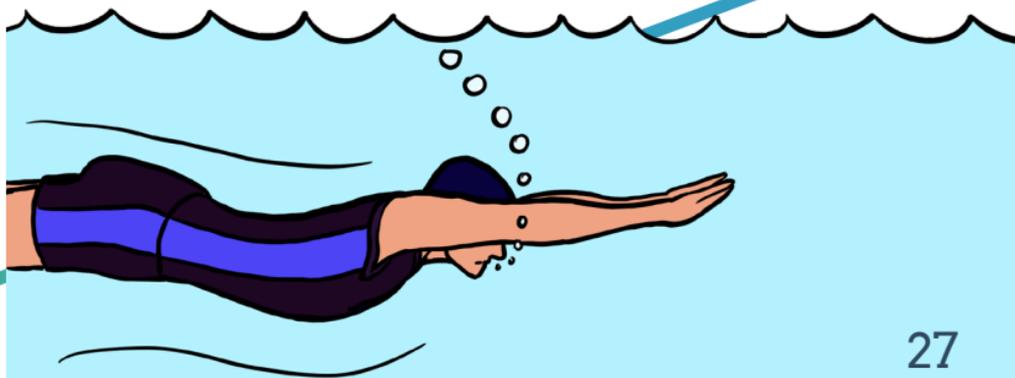
## You should take off your binder if:

- You are feeling any kind of physical discomfort, including if it feels too tight, itchy or irritating, or you feel it is restricting your breathing while doing non-physical or light physical activity. Binders should not limit your breathing or feel uncomfortably tight. If you experience itching or irritating, speak with your GP.
- You feel discomfort in your appearance, or feel anxiety around wearing a binder. Some people do not like the feeling or appearance of a binder, and it's okay not to want to wear one. If you want to bind but feel it's not the right time yet, you could look to come back to it the future, or try other safe alternatives to binding highlighted earlier in the guide.
- You realise that it has been more than or is approaching eight hours that you've been binding. Take off your binder as soon as you feel you are safe and able to.

*“I try to keep to less than 8 hours of binding a day and try to give myself days off when I can. If I go over a healthy amount of binding, or if it’s around my period, I can feel the effects of binding a lot more. I get a soreness on my sternum that can be intensely uncomfortable.”*

### **Age 25, non-binary/agender person**

- You feel you may fall asleep. Falling asleep in a binder is not advisable, and you should take your binder off before sleeping, even if you are only planning on a short nap.
- You are engaging in exercise. You may wish to use a sports bra instead for exercising in. While binders should be breathable, it is not advisable to exercise in them. You may wish to look to acquire a binder for swimming if you wish to swim.



# Navigating the world with a binder

You may feel a great deal of emotions when you first put on a binder. You may feel very happy, you may be excited, you may feel nothing at all. Remember looking down at yourself will make your chest look larger than it actually is, and looking at yourself in the mirror with a shirt or clothes over the binder will be more accurate to reality. Some people decide after seeing themselves in a binder that binding isn't for them, and that's also okay. If you decide to start using a binder regularly, then you will need to take some things into consideration.



## Who knows you bind?

Ideally you would like people who you see regularly to know you are binding in case you need to take a break. In some cases, people won't notice you are binding, and in some they might notice and ask if they don't know. If you are struggling to tell people, perhaps consider writing down what you want to say first and giving it to them, or giving them this booklet to explain more about binders.

## Can you take a break?

If you're out and about and start to get uncomfortable for any reason, can you go and adjust the binder or take it off? It may be that you need to have a conversation with your line manager at work, for example, to alert them to you potentially needing to take a quick break to take off the binder if needed. Knowing whether there is a gender-neutral or accessible toilet nearby could be useful if you are nervous about using gendered toilets. If you are using a binder for the first time and it is possible to do so, you could organise to have a couple of days at or near your home so you can easily get changed if needed.

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*“I tried to engage in body positivity exercises, I tried different looks and tried to be more free in my presentation. Nothing worked, because I was never presenting an authentic representation of myself, because I wasn’t a young woman. [...] Families need to support family members who bind to make sure they’re doing so safely. When I came out, for about 18 months, I experienced prolonged periods of being ignored by [my parents], my needs being ignored, or being verbally (and very occasionally physically) lashed out at. I felt unsafe talking to my parents further about my feelings of discomfort with my body, so even with a part-time job around my college work, I could only afford a cheap binder. It had little give for breathing, but it was better than a bra and I was euphoric at my appearance for the first time in my life. It was only when someone bought me a GC2B binder when I was at university that I realised what safe binding was supposed to feel like.”*

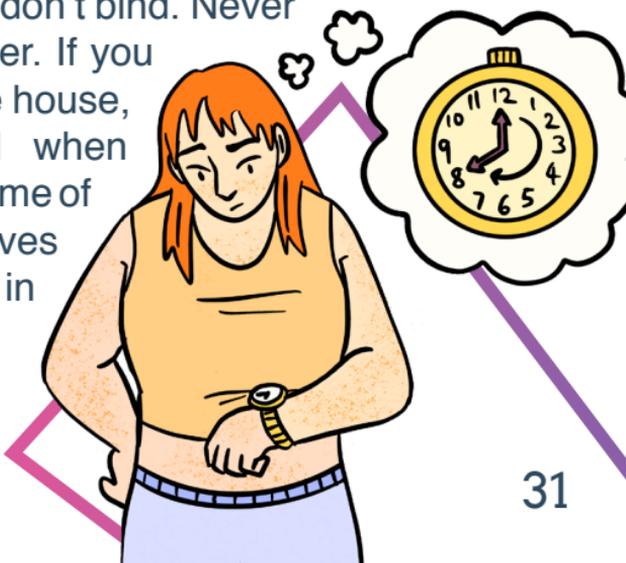
**Age 23, trans masculine/non-binary person**

## Don't exert yourself!

If you think you're going to be doing exercise or running at all, do you have a sports bra or something else to change into? It's sometimes difficult to balance the dysphoria you may feel with making sure you're physically active, but it is not a good idea to engage in a lot of exercise while binding. If you are swimming regularly, you may wish to acquire a swim binder.

## How long are you binding for?

Aim to bind no longer than eight hours at a time. This can be difficult to stick to in our daily life, but if you are finding you can't keep below eight hours, you should add more days and periods of time where you don't bind. Never sleep in your binder. If you are not leaving the house, aim to not bind when possible, or use some of the safe alternatives mentioned earlier in the booklet.



# When you take off your binder...

Mucus can sometimes become more settled in the chest area, particularly if you have been binding more than eight hours.



*“Binding has given me the freedom to experiment with my gender identity and how I express that and frequently gives me the strength to go outside presenting male when otherwise I’d be far more nervous to.”*

### **Age 19, non-binary person**

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After removing the binder, lift your arms above your head and give two or three coughs to shift any mucus.

Take a few deep, slow breaths to let your chest readjust to not being in a binder. You should see your GP if you are finding that you have more mucus in your throat or chest than usual, or you find yourself needing to cough more during the day.

Check where the binder has been on you. If you notice any marks that suggest it has been digging into you, then this can be a sign that the binder is too tight for you, and you need to look to get a larger size.

**See your GP if you notice any rashes or skin irritation.**

# Where can I go if I need support?

## **LGBT Foundation**

0345 330 30 30  
[www.lgbt.foundation](http://www.lgbt.foundation)

## **Mermaids**

[www.mermaids.org.uk](http://www.mermaids.org.uk)

## **The Proud Trust**

[www.theproudtrust.org](http://www.theproudtrust.org)

## **Greater**

## **Manchester**

## **Groups for trans and non-binary people**

[www.lgbt.foundation/trans-groups](http://www.lgbt.foundation/trans-groups)

## **TransUnite**

Find your local trans support group:  
[www.transunite.co.uk](http://www.transunite.co.uk)



## **Mindline Trans+**

0300 330 5468  
[www.bristolmind.org.uk/help-and-counselling/mindline-transplus](http://www.bristolmind.org.uk/help-and-counselling/mindline-transplus)

## **TranzWiki**

[www.tranzwiki.net](http://www.tranzwiki.net)

## **42nd Street**

[www.42ndstreet.org.uk](http://www.42ndstreet.org.uk)

# Glossary

**Trans:** An inclusive term for anyone whose gender identity does not completely match the gender that they were assigned at birth.

**Non-binary:** A term to describe a person who does not identify with, or not entirely with, the binary labels of “man” and “woman”.

**Binding:** Using materials or items of clothing to reduce the appearance of the chest.

**Dysphoria:** A feeling of discomfort or distress from society’s incorrect perception of a person’s gender. If someone is experiencing dysphoria, they may say they feel “dysphoric”.

**Misgender:** Referring to someone using incorrect gendered terms, or treating them as the incorrect gender.

**Binder Exchange:** A community-run exchange programme that takes safe, second-hand binders from those who no longer need them, and gives them for free or at a reduced cost to those who could not otherwise afford one.

We believe in a fair  
and equal society  
where all lesbian, gay,  
bisexual and trans  
people can achieve  
their full potential.

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**Tel:** 0345 3 30 30 30 **Email:** info@lgbt.foundation **Web:** www.lgbt.foundation

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Designed by [www.markeastwood.co.uk](http://www.markeastwood.co.uk)

Illustration by [www.juliangrayart.com](http://www.juliangrayart.com)