

Patient Information Sheet

Abdominoplasty (Tummy Tuck)



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Abdominoplasty, commonly called a “tummy tuck”, is an operation to remove excess fat and skin from the abdomen. The surgeon may also tighten the tummy muscles. The aim is to produce a tighter, flatter stomach and it may partially reduce the appearance of stretch marks.

Why have a Tummy Tuck?

The reasons why someone may choose to have a tummy tuck include having excess skin stretch marks or loose abdominal muscles which may happen after:

- » Losing a lot of weight through dieting and exercise
- » Pregnancy
- » Successful surgery to treat obesity

A tummy tuck is not a treatment of weight control and is not a substitute for regular physical activity and a healthy balanced diet.

What are the alternatives?

For some people, an alternative is liposuction (or liposculpture), where fat is sucked out through small holes in the skin.

Many creams, diet supplements and beauty treatments claim to reduce stubborn areas of fat and even cellulite. However, there is no scientific proof that they work.

What happens before a Tummy Tuck?

It is important to discuss with your surgeon what you are hoping to gain from the operation and the result you can realistically expect. The surgeon will discuss how to prepare for your operation.

For example, you may be asked to:

- » Lose weight if you are overweight – a tummy tuck give the best results in people who are the correct weight for their height.
- » Stop taking the contraceptive pill six weeks before surgery and use an alternative method of contraception as this reduces the risk of blood clotting (thrombosis) after the operation.
- » Give up or cut down on smoking – smoking increase the risk of chest infection and slows the healing of the wounds.
- » Be measured by a Pharmacist for and purchase a binder that extends from the edge of your ribs to over your hips. This is important after to reduce swelling.

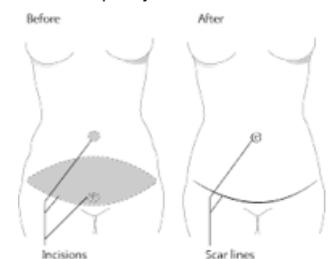
What should I expect in hospital?

Most people stay in hospital for one to three days.

The Operation

The operation is performed under general anaesthetic, which means that you will be asleep throughout

A diagram showing the abdominoplasty incisions and scar lines



the procedure and will feel no pain. Typically, you must not eat or drink for about six hours before a general anaesthetic. However, some Anaesthetists allow occasional sips of water until two hours beforehand.

During a tummy tuck, the surgeon removes excess fat and skin from the lower tummy and if necessary, tightens the muscles of the abdomen.

You will be left with a scar around the tummy button (which will often be moved to a higher position) and a long scar along the bikini line, which can usually be hidden within your underwear.

After the operation

When you wake up after the operation you will find a drip in your arm. This is to give you fluid while you can't eat and drink.

There will be a drainage tube in each side of your lower tummy to drain any blood or watery liquid that collects from the operation site. These drains are usually removed a few days after surgery.

You may also be wearing anti-thrombosis compression stockings to help the circulation in your legs and help prevent blood clots forming (deep vein thrombosis or DVT). Your doctor or nurse will give you painkilling tablets or injections to reduce any pain that you have after the operation.

It is important to do deep breathing exercises to help to reduce the risk of developing a chest infection.

Your doctor or nurse can show you how to do these. For the first few days, you will be asked to keep your knees and hips bent when you sleep at night to reduce strain on your stitches.

Recovering after a Tummy Tuck

In general, healing can be slow, particularly in the central part of the operation site and sometimes dressings are needed for a few weeks. You may experience some tightness around the operation site, but this is more common in patients who are overweight and who smoke.

You should try to be careful not to strain or stretch the operation side which you first get home as this will increase fluid accumulation and reduce healing.

As soon as you feel able, you should try to walk a little each day. This will also help to prevent a chest infection, and blood clots forming in your legs. If you find getting around particularly painful or difficult, talk to the hospital or your doctor about effective pain relief.

You should continue wearing an elastic garment for three weeks as this helps to reduce the swelling and makes you feel more comfortable. Most people are able to return to work between 2-4 weeks after the operation, but vigorous exercise is not recommended for at least 6 weeks.

Deciding on Treatment

It's important not to rush into the decision to have a cosmetic operation and it's sensible to discuss the issue with your GP, who may be able to recommend a reputable surgeon, or give advice about how to choose which hospitals to be treated in.

A tummy tuck is a commonly performed and generally safe surgical procedure. For most people, the benefits in terms of improved appearance are greater than any disadvantages. However, in order to give informed consent, you need to be aware of the possible side effects and the risk of complications.

Side-effects are the unwanted but mostly temporary effects of a successful procedure. For example, feeling sick as a result of the general anaesthetic. Anyone having a tummy tuck can also expect that:

- » There will be swelling, which may not completely settle for a few months.
- » The incisions will leave scars, which will be pink and noticeable at first, but should become finer and less noticeable after a few weeks.

Complications are unexpected problems that can occur during or after the procedure. Most people are not affected. The main complications of any operation are bleeding during or soon after the procedure, infection and an abnormal reaction to the anaesthetic. It's also possible for a blood clot to develop in a vein in the legs (deep vein thrombosis or DVT).

Specific complications of a tummy tuck are uncommon but can include those listed below:

- » Numbness in the lower part of the tummy which often reduces over the next 6-12 months following the operation but can be permanent.
- » Poor healing which results in noticeable scars, may mean you need more surgery.
- » Final position of the tummy button may be off-centre.
- » Bleeding can occur under the skin, causing the area to swell and become painful. This is called a haematoma. Sometimes it is necessary to return to theatre to stop the bleeding, remove the blood and help avoid infection.

Other serious complications of tummy tuck operation are rare. They include the formation of fat or blood clots in the blood vessels. These can break off and move to the lungs. This is called a pulmonary embolism and can be life-threatening.

The chance of complication depends on the exact type of procedure that is being performed and other factors such as your general health. Your surgeon will be able to explain how the risks apply to you.