

ABDOMINOPLASTY (TUMMY TUCK)

APPROXIMATE COST: \$3,700-\$6,500

There may be additional charges for surgical facilities and anesthesia. Be sure to request this information.

APPROXIMATE TIME UNTIL COMPLETELY HEALED:

You'll be happy with the initial results immediately. You'll probably look good three months post-op. It takes a full year, however, for everything to be completely healed and normal.

BEFORE YOU SET A DATE

There is a deep fat pad lying below the belly button that is physically exclusive to women (men develop a "spare tire" around the middle of their body instead). Also, after several pregnancies many women develop wrinkled and hanging abdominal skin, particularly if an abdominal hernia has occurred. If you want to eliminate these conditions, liposuction will not be enough to do the trick. You will need to have an abdominoplasty, commonly known as a tummy tuck.

Like liposuction, a tummy tuck is not an alternative without weight reduction. It will improve your abdominal silhouette by surgically giving you a smoother and flatter stomach. However, if you gain a lot of weight your stomach will once again expand.

The trade-off with a tummy tuck is a flatter, smoother stomach versus a rather conspicuous permanent scar. Depending on the amount of skin to be removed, the scar can be anything from a small incision to a long line running from one hip across the pubic area and up to the other hip. So before you decide on surgery, be very aware of the trade-off; you'll have a flatter and unwrinkled tummy that will look great in a one-piece bathing suit, but buck naked you will be left with an obvious scar.

If a patient is suffering from a massive apron of fat (such as after a huge weight loss) a panniculectomy is performed. Symptoms relevant to this surgery include a breakdown of the abdominal muscle structure, strain on the lumbar spine, chronic low back pain and difficulty in walking. This procedure is definitely more therapeutic than cosmetic in nature. If you feel you require a panniculectomy, discuss it in great detail with your internist as well as a plastic surgeon.

PRESURGICAL INSTRUCTIONS

- You will be given blood and lab tests prior to surgery. Take no aspirin or aspirin-containing products; they can cause bleeding and bruising. See list of medications to avoid for two weeks prior to your surgery and ten days after (see list of medications to avoid). You may take Tylenol.

- ❑ If you take medication daily, notify your doctor. Also tell him if you develop an illness or cold within a week of your surgery.
- ❑ If you're a smoker you should clearly understand that nicotine can impair and delay healing. Most offices will suggest quitting a week to ten days before surgery, a week post-op. If it were me, I'd stop smoking a minimum of three weeks prior to surgery, and not touch a cigarette for a full month post-op. Who needs to be left with scars worse than normal and other complications as a result of smoking through the pre- and postsurgical period?

THE DAY BEFORE SURGERY

Do not eat or drink anything after midnight.

THE DAY OF SURGERY

- You may rinse and brush your teeth, but ***do not eat or drink anything***. Some offices may ask you to take pills with a small amount of water the day of surgery.
- wear no makeup and remove your contact lenses and dentures for surgery. ***Do not put any moisturizer on your eyes or face.***
- Do not bring any jewelry or valuables. Wear a robe, housecoat or warmup suit that buttons or zips in the front, and wear flat shoes. ***No tight-fitting clothes.***
- ***Someone must drive you home the day of your surgery and stay with you the first night.***
- Postoperative instructions regarding activity, medications and office visits will be given following your surgery.

THE SURGERY

Abdominoplasty surgery takes approximately three to four hours. Add an additional half hour for preparation and anesthesia. There are normally four people in the operating room with you: the surgeon, the anesthesiologist and two surgical nurses. You will be given antibiotics through your I.V. during surgery. Because this is considered major surgery, the doctor may choose to have an assistant present and the procedure may take place in the hospital rather than in the office surgical facilities.

Unlike liposuction, abdominoplasty is a rather extensive procedure. An incision is made from under one hip bone, down under the low abdominal crease across the pubic area and up to the other hip bone. An incision may also be made around the umbilicus (belly button).

The skin is freed-up (separated) from the abdominal incision line clear up to the rib cage area under the breasts. The abdominal fat pad is surgically removed, and if hernia repair is necessary (which is quite common), the surgeon tightens the loose underlying tissue and two muscles together with sutures. This procedure will diminish the size of the waistline to a certain degree, but don't look for an hourglass waistline post-op--it just won't happen.

The freed-up skin is brought downward, and the surgeon cuts a new opening for the belly button that is then sutured closed around the navel.

The excess skin is trimmed away to fit the abdominal incision, and two drains are inserted into the abdominal area for a couple of days to prevent bleeding problems. The abdominal incision is immediately closed with sutures that will be removed in 14 days. Steri-strips or staples may also reinforce the sutured incision line. A firm elastic binder is applied to the entire area clear up to the rib cage.

POSTSURGICAL INSTRUCTIONS

1. Physical activity should be limited to movements that are comfortable. For the first two days you should stay reclined with bent knees, getting up only to go to the bathroom. Stay close to home the first two weeks after surgery.
2. Wear the supportive garment that was selected prior to the surgery 24 hours a day for four to six weeks. As a general rule, the supportive garment should be worn until the bruising and discomfort have subsided.
3. Anesthetics and pain medication tend to produce constipation. High-fiber diets and stool softeners will help reduce the likelihood of constipation following surgery.
4. You may shower after surgery whenever you wish. Remove the surgical garment and dressings. After showering, pat the incision areas gently with a towel. Reapply Polysporin Ointment and a clean cotton dressing.
5. Keep your surgical garment clean. It is machine washable and dryable. It's a good idea to have two surgical garments so you can wear one while the other is being laundered. Bicycle pants work very nicely as an alternative corset.
6. No driving until pain medication has worn off.
7. Take a multivitamin and an iron supplement following surgery. Be sure to discuss your dosage with your doctor before medicating (it depends on your blood loss).
8. No exercise or aerobics for six to eight weeks post-op.

Supplies to have at home: Polysporin Ointment, two-by-two inch cotton gauze squares and paper bandage tape.

THE RECOVERY PERIOD

Because abdominoplasty is major surgery, you should expect to feel rather weak for several weeks post-op. It usually takes at least eight full weeks to recover your normal energy and stamina. Don't be surprised if you experience some depression for a few days after surgery. It's a common reaction, and it will pass as you regain your strength.

Be prepared for some serious discomfort following this surgery. You will need to remain in a sitting position the first two to four days. In other words, even when you lie down or stand up, your knees must remain bent at all times. If you straighten up, you'll rip out your stitches! The first couple of weeks are really tough, and you'll need to take some prescribed pain medication during this period and perhaps even a little longer.

Because everything has been pulled down and repositioned so tightly, you will not be physically able to stand up straight for about two weeks after the operation. For goodness sake, don't fight it and attempt to straighten up too soon. Many women develop temporary lower back problems as a result of having to stay bent all this time, but the back problems usually clear up once they're walking normally again. Low back exercises are frequently helpful, but only after six to eight weeks post-op and with your doctor's permission.

Prepare yourself for some serious swelling and bruising for several weeks; wearing your surgical girdle religiously will help control the swelling.

Another temporary problem that often develops is a sloughing of the skin in the area. This condition clears up as the area begins to calm down through more progressed healing, usually after the fourth week post-op. Actually, you'll see some skin sloughing around most all surgical incision lines, whether they've been pulled tight or not. It all goes away.

Don't become depressed if the abdominal scar looks thick and puffy. The scar will flatten out in six to 12 months, and many people opt for a little liposuction to reduce any remaining fullness around the healed incision. Sometimes an unacceptable scar will remain, and you'll want to have a scar revision at a later date. Scar revision surgery is reasonably uncomplicated, and a knowledgeable and careful surgeon can accomplish major improvements with this procedure.

If you're dieting, don't start any extreme programs until at least three weeks after surgery. For proper healing purposes you need to maintain a healthy and balanced diet those first few post-op weeks.

You can usually return to work (depending on the extent and severity of the surgery) three to four weeks after the procedure.

Absolutely no exercise or aerobics until six to eight weeks post-op, and only with your doctor's permission.

PROBLEM SIGNS

If there is any sign of infection, call your doctor at once. Raised, sore areas and uneven (one-sided) swelling are symptoms that could indicate entirely bleeding, and your doctor must be informed immediately.

Any buildup of fluid in the abdominal area is a serious problem that your doctor will need to know about right away. The area will be swollen, and you will actually be able to feel water in there. Your doctor will surgically drain the fluid out of the area as soon as possible.

MAKEUP TRICKS

You can apply makeup to camouflage bruising 48 hours after the sutures have been removed, but only if the incision lines are completely healed over and dry. Dermablend, Physicians Formula Velvet Film, Max Factor Pan Stick, Clinique Continuous Coverage, Prescriptives Camouflage Creme, Cover Mark or Nature Cover all are very effective products. The makeup creams will not camouflage the abdominal scar but will cover up any redness or discoloration of it.