

Tummy Tuck (Abdominoplasty)

Abdominoplasty, known more commonly as a "tummy tuck," is a major surgical procedure to remove excess skin and fat from the middle and lower abdomen and to tighten the muscles of the abdominal wall. The procedure can dramatically reduce the appearance of a protruding abdomen. But bear in mind, it does produce a permanent scar, which, depending on the extent of the original problem and the surgery required to correct it, can extend from hip to hip. This is not a minor procedure. It represents one of the major aesthetic procedures with associated major risks. Plan to take some time off if you are considering this procedure.

The best candidates for abdominoplasty are men or women who are in relatively good shape but are bothered by a large fat deposit or loose abdominal skin that won't respond to diet or exercise. The surgery is particularly helpful to women who, through multiple pregnancies, have stretched their abdominal muscles and skin beyond the point where they can return to normal. Loss of skin elasticity in older patients, which frequently occurs with slight obesity, can also be improved.

Patients who intend to lose a lot of weight should postpone the surgery. Also, women who plan future pregnancies should wait, as vertical muscles in the abdomen that are tightened during surgery can separate again during pregnancy.

An abdominoplasty is a cosmetic/aesthetic procedure not covered by insurance carriers. A panniculectomy is not an abdominoplasty. A panniculectomy is the simple removal of the excessive skin of the lower abdomen. It is not a cosmetic/aesthetic procedure. Results are extremely different from those of an abdominoplasty. An abdominoplasty often includes tightening of the abdominal wall, liposuction and contouring of the abdomen and belly button. A panniculectomy is not an abdominoplasty. The results are entirely different.

Thousands of abdominoplasties are performed successfully each year. When done by a qualified plastic surgeon who is trained in body contouring, the results are generally quite positive. Nevertheless, there are always risks associated with surgery and specific complications associated with this procedure. Post-operative complications such as infection and blood clots are rare, but can occur. Infection can be treated with drainage and antibiotics, but will prolong your hospital stay. You can minimize the risk of blood clots by moving around as soon after the surgery as possible. Poor healing, which results in conspicuous scars, may necessitate a second operation. Smokers should be advised to stop, as smoking may increase the risk of complications and delay healing. Do not have this surgical procedure if you cannot stop smoking.

Complete abdominoplasty usually takes two to five hours, depending on the extent of work required. Partial abdominoplasty may take an hour or two. Most commonly, the surgeon will make a long incision from hipbone to hipbone, just above the pubic area. A second incision is made to free the navel from surrounding tissue. With partial abdominoplasty, the incision is much shorter and the navel may not be moved, although

it may be pulled into an unnatural shape as the skin is tightened and stitched. Next, the surgeon separates the skin from the abdominal wall all the way up to your ribs and lifts a large skin flap to reveal the vertical muscles in your abdomen. These muscles are tightened by pulling them close together and stitching them into their new position. This provides a firmer abdominal wall and narrows the waistline. Artificial mesh may be required to reinforce and produce a flat abdominal wall.

The skin flap is then stretched down and the extra skin is removed. A new hole is cut for your navel, which is then stitched in place. Finally, the incisions will be stitched, dressings will be applied, and a temporary tube may be inserted to drain excess fluid from the surgical site.

In partial abdominoplasty, the skin is separated only between the incision line and the navel. This skin flap is stretched down, the excess is removed, and the flap is stitched back into place. Pain pumps are now commonly placed to decrease post operative pain. Depending on the extent of the surgery, you may be released within a few hours after surgery, stay overnight or, you may have to remain hospitalized for two to three days. Female patients relate that the post operative pain is similar to an abdominal hysterectomy. It is important to have someone to care for you in the post operative period. You could require assistance for 3 to 5 days postoperatively. It may take you weeks or months to feel like your old self again. If you start out in top physical condition with strong abdominal muscles, recovery from abdominoplasty will be much faster. Some people return to work after two weeks, while others take three or four weeks to rest and recuperate. Abdominoplasty, whether partial or complete, produces excellent results for patients with weakened abdominal muscles or excess skin. And in most cases, the results are long lasting, if you follow a balanced diet and exercise regularly.

If you're realistic in your expectations and prepared for the consequences of a permanent scar and a lengthy recovery period, abdominoplasty may be just the answer for you.