



Tummy Tuck
(Abdominoplasty)

see
change
COSMETIC SURGERY

General information

A tummy tuck or abdominoplasty is performed to improve the appearance of the tummy. The two most common reasons for performing this operation are following pregnancy and after significant weight loss. It is best for the operation to be performed once all planned pregnancies are completed or when no further weight loss is anticipated.

The abdominoplasty operation involves the removal of excess skin and fat, improving the whole of the tummy, from ribs to hips. This leaves a scar in the bikini-line, running from hip-to-hip. The tummy muscles are tightened and a new hole is made for the belly button, which usually heals in a different shape.

The mini-abdominoplasty is performed when the muscle weakness and excess tissue is confined to the lower abdomen, i.e. beneath the belly button. A slightly shorter scar is left in the bikini-line and the belly button is not repositioned. Although the belly button may be pulled down slightly it will not have a scar around it.

Preparation for surgery

Smoking can cause problems with wound healing and increase your risk of a chest infection following general anaesthetic. You must not smoke for at least four weeks before your operation and for four weeks after it.

Please, only take medication prescribed by your doctor for the two weeks before and two weeks after your operation. In particular, herbal, homeopathic and nutritional supplements (including vitamin E capsules) may contain substances that increase your risk of bleeding and cause sun sensitivity.

Aspirin, and other non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) increase your risk of bleeding. You should avoid all such medicines for two

weeks before and two weeks after your operation. If you are concerned, please check with your GP that it is safe to do so. In certain specific circumstances, you may be prescribed a NSAID for your post-operative pain, which you should take as directed.

If you drink alcohol, it is best to drink only a small amount for the week before the operation and for the first two weeks of your recovery. You should avoid it altogether if you are taking antibiotics or strong pain medication.

Your recovery after the operation will be easier if you are fit and maintain a healthy lifestyle. Regular exercise will help you cope with the operation better.

If you feel unwell leading up to your operation please inform our secretary, as it may be best to reschedule your operation for when you are well.

Do not have surgery if you may be pregnant.

The operation

Please come for your operation in loose-fitting clothing that can be easily and comfortably removed. Slip-on shoes are best, as bending over may be uncomfortable. Avoid nail varnish and heavy make-up. Rings, ear-rings and body-piercings should be removed at home. Bring your normal medication with you and a sufficient supply for the duration of your anticipated stay in hospital. Someone should accompany you to the hospital and home when you leave hospital.

The operation is performed under general anaesthesia (asleep). You should expect to be in hospital for two to three nights. You will usually have two drains. Getting up and about after the operation is important although it will be painful to start with. You should try to do this as soon as possible.

Care after your surgery

You will be given a tightly fitting binder to wear after your surgery, which you should wear as instructed.

The incisions will be closed with dissolving stitches and protected with a dressing. Keep the wounds dry while your drains are in place. You may start to shower your tummy after removal of your drains, unless specifically advised not to, but do not soak in a bath. Dry the area with great care, patting it gently with a towel. The dressing should be changed at least every other day, but can be changed more often if necessary. Once the scars are entirely dry, and no longer staining the dressing, you can stop covering them. However, you may prefer to keep the scars covered until you are no longer wearing the binder:

After two weeks, provided that your scar has healed and is dry, start to moisturise and massage your tummy paying particular attention to the scars. Use any plain skin moisturiser (which can contain vitamin E if you wish) and rub the cream in with a gentle massaging motion for 5-10 minutes, three times a day.

All scars should be protected from the sun for the first year after surgery. Ideally they should be covered with clothing. If this is not practical, then total sun block should be used and the area shaded from the sun. Sun exposure of a fresh scar can cause permanent discolouration, resulting in a darkened, visible scar.

You should avoid becoming constipated after your surgery. If you are prone to this then you must take a stool softener during your recovery.

What to expect after your surgery

You will have a scar running from hip-to-hip (slightly shorter in a mini-abdominoplasty) and around your belly button (only in a full

abdominoplasty), which will now have a different shape. These are usually red and slightly raised during the early period of healing. It takes a few months for the scars to settle fully and massage can aid this process, once it is comfortable enough to do so. Your tummy will feel numb but this will gradually recover over several months. During this time you must avoid contact with hot things, such as a hot water bottle, as there is a risk of being burned. Your tummy will feel tight at first and you will experience some pain and discomfort. This settles in the first few weeks after surgery. You may find it more comfortable to sleep with a pillow under your knees during this period. Please take your pain medication as directed until you are able to move about comfortably. Breathing may be sore but it is important you take regular deep breaths and cough frequently, supporting your tummy when you do so, to avoid a chest infection post-operatively.

A follow-up appointment will be arranged for you when you leave hospital.

Driving and activity

All heavy and strenuous activity should be avoided for the first few weeks after your surgery. Graduated activity and exercise can then be started with full, unrestricted activity after twelve weeks, as your comfort allows. (Your recovery may be quicker if you have had a mini-abdominoplasty.) You will be able to start driving again when you feel comfortable and are safe doing so. This is usually between two and four weeks. Some car insurance companies have guidelines for driving after surgery and it is always best to check with your own company whether there are any restrictions imposed on you.

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Complications

Although complications are uncommon, problems may occur as a result of your surgery. These can result in prolonged recovery but may also have an adverse effect on your final result. These include poor or visible scarring, bleeding, infection, delayed healing, wound breakdown, fluid collection, persistent numbness or pain, and asymmetry or unevenness. Further surgery may be necessary to correct some of these, should they occur. A charge may have to be made for any additional treatment. There is also a small risk of developing a venous thrombosis (DVT), although measures are taken to minimise this risk.

Additional comments

If you have any questions about the information contained in this leaflet or you do not understand something that is included in it, please contact our secretary for clarification.

If you are concerned about your recovery, have bleeding, feel unwell or have increasing pain then please contact Clare Park Hospital, our secretary (during office hours), your local A+E Department, or your GP.

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