

## Tummy Tuck (abdominoplasty)

This is an operation that is used to improve the appearance of your abdomen. It is usually performed under general anaesthesia and the entire procedure takes about 3 hours. Recovery will vary, but as a general guide, people who have office type jobs are usually back to work after 3 weeks, whereas those with more manual type jobs are usually back to work after 4-6 weeks.

The surgery involves the removal of excess fat and tissue from the abdominal area, with or without the use of liposuction (where excess fat is sucked out using a special catheter) and there is often tightening of the abdominal wall and muscles. This is a major procedure with a risk of deep vein thrombosis, wound infection, collection of wound fluid (seroma) and chest infections. It is very important to make sure that you are at an optimal weight and that you take regular exercise prior to the operation, to aid recovery after the operation.

Wound complications are very common in people who smoke tobacco and so this operation cannot be done on smokers. I generally advise a period of at least three months of no smoking before surgery.

After the operation you will have two wound drains in place, these are to drain any excess blood and fluid that may collect in the abdominal area post-operatively. You will also have an abdominal binder or compression garment in place. This is to give the wound some support, reduce swelling and bleeding and to make moving around more comfortable. You will be able to get up and move around the room later that day and by the next day you will be moving around more freely. Some patients do have difficulty in passing urine and therefore they will require placement of a catheter by one of the nursing team. There is usually a tight feeling in the abdomen, which can be worse when the abdominal muscles are tightened.

Most patients will need to go home with their drains in place and these are removed on day 5 after surgery as an outpatient at the hospital. Sometimes the drains are removed much earlier.

The abdominoplasty scar will be quite long. It is about three times as long as a caesarean section scar and it extends across the abdomen. The scar is never symmetrical in the long term, although it is planned to be symmetrical it usually lifts up in the middle. There is also a second scar around the umbilicus (tummy button) and occasionally also a vertical scar in the mid-line.

The operation scar and the skin surrounding it is often numb for several months, but gradually the sensation will return. There are often problems with the healing of the wound, particularly in the middle of the long transverse scar and this often needs regular dressings. It is unusual to get a wound infection, as this area is easy to keep clean and dry, but this may occur and you may need to take some antibiotics to help the healing process.

Almost all patients will require some minor adjustment to the scar. This is usually done about 6-12 months later and there is no surgical fee for this, but there will be a hospital fee. In most cases this minor revision is done under a local anaesthetic, but if a general anaesthetic is required there will be a fee. The anaesthetic fees are set by the consultant anaesthetist.

- **We would ask you not to take any herbal or over the counter medicines prior to having a surgical procedure. Many homeopathic chemists advocate the use of arnica before surgery, however this is quite harmful as it causes more bleeding during the surgery.**
- **You will be given antibiotics during your surgery. Do remember that for women using the oral contraceptive, this will be less effective as a result of taking antibiotics, especially the oral ones. You will need an alternative form of contraception whilst taking the antibiotics and for seven days afterwards.**

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