

Surgical Services: Abdominoplasty

An abdominoplasty, also known as a tummy tuck, does exactly what the name says - it tucks in a protruding tummy so that your abdomen looks firmer and flatter. In most cases, a balanced diet and regular exercise will help you achieve lasting results. Unless you gain or lose a significant amount of weight or become pregnant, your abdomen should remain firm and flat for many years.

WHAT DOES A TUMMY TUCK INVOLVE?

This procedure involves the removal of fat and skin from the abdomen and the tightening of the muscles around the abdomen. A tummy tuck is more extensive than liposuction, which only removes fat.

A tummy tuck is often requested by women who've just had a baby and want to tighten their stomach muscles. There are different types of tummy tucks that can be tailored to your specific needs.

AM I A GOOD CANDIDATE?

The best candidates are individuals who are generally in good shape, but have loose skin or large abdominal fat deposits that do not respond to diet and exercise. Women whose abdomens have been stretched from multiple pregnancies can also benefit from a tummy tuck.

If you plan to lose a lot of weight, it's better to postpone a tummy tuck until you've reached your target weight. If you are a woman, you should also wait until after you have had your last child.

WHAT IS THE TREATMENT LIKE?

The area of skin that will be removed is carefully marked, and then an incision is made on the bikini line from hipbone to hipbone. Your surgeon then makes a second incision around the navel. He will pull down excess skin and remove it, along with the underlying fatty tissue. Your surgeon may also bring your abdominal muscles together with sutures to tighten them and trim your waist. After the procedure, the incision is closed with several layers of sutures.

With a mini-tummy tuck, the incision is much shorter, and there is usually no incision around the navel. Some of the lower abdominal skin is removed and the lower abdominal muscles are tightened. Mini-tummy tucks can be effective with patients who have relatively mild abdominal bulges or excess skin only in the lower part of the abdomen. Since many patients are not candidates for a mini-tummy tuck, it is important to discuss your options with your physician.

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WHAT CAN I EXPECT BEFORE AND AFTER TREATMENT?

Before your treatment

You'll have a consultation with a surgeon, who will talk to you about your health goals and give you an examination. The surgeon will check your abdomen while you're standing and lying down and assess your skin tone and the amount of loose skin in the area. He or she will also evaluate the amount of fat in your abdomen and the condition of your abdominal muscles. Together, you'll discuss the various options available and decide on the treatment that's right for you.

If you decide to have a tummy tuck, your surgeon will give you specific instructions on how to prepare for surgery. You will be required to stop smoking and stop using nicotine patches and gum at least four to six weeks prior to surgery. You should also avoid overexposure to the sun. You may be asked to stop taking certain medications, including some that may increase bleeding. Don't go on a strict diet before your treatment, because a diet could make it harder for your body to heal.

If you develop a cold or infection, your procedure may be postponed.

A complete tummy tuck typically takes between three and four hours under general anesthesia. A mini-tummy tuck takes between one and two hours. The procedure is done at our hospital or outpatient surgical center. You'll have a permanent scar - in some cases the scar can extend from hip to hip. But the scar will lighten over time and won't be visible under most clothing. Whenever possible, the surgeon will make the incision along the panty line to help conceal the scar.

After your treatment

Abdominoplasty is typically an outpatient procedure. However, some patients may be required to stay overnight if their procedure is combined with a hysterectomy. Everyone's recovery is different, but you should start walking as soon as possible to get your blood circulating. At first, you might find it hard to stand up straight, and you can expect your abdomen to be swollen for a few days. For the first two weeks or so, you may have to walk slightly bent at the waist. You should not do any exercise more strenuous than walking during the first four to six weeks following surgery, and should not lift more than 10 pounds for six weeks.

Your medical care team will work with you to relieve pain and help you feel as comfortable as possible. You will need to arrange for someone to drive you home after your surgery and to help you out at home for a couple of days.

Some people return to work two to three weeks after the procedure, while others take three to four weeks to recover. People who are in good physical condition with strong abdominal muscles recover more quickly.

ARE THERE ANY RISKS?

As with any surgery, there are risks associated with having a tummy tuck. They include bleeding, infection, scars, asymmetry, rippling of the skin, tissue loss, and decreased sensation of the abdominal skin. At Kaiser Permanente, we believe you should fully understand all that's involved in your surgery and have realistic expectations. Your surgeon will take the time you need to discuss the potential risks as well as postoperative care.