

POSTOPERATIVE CARE-OUTPATIENT SURGERY ABDOMINOPLASTY

- **Your first 24 hours**

someone should stay overnight with you.

- **Position**

Since the abdominoplasty involves removal of extra abdominal skin and (usually) tightening of the abdominal muscles, you will experience some difficulty standing up straight for a week or two or even longer. During this period, you may find it more comfortable to place a pillow or two under your knees while in bed. The tightness will gradually disappear as you heal and progressively use your body muscles for the activities of daily living. Please make no special attempts to stretch or pull the abdomen straight during the first 2-3 weeks of healing. You must change your position and walk around the house every few hours to reduce the danger of blood clots.

- **Dressings**

An elastic abdominal binder will be placed around your tummy after surgery to provide some gentle pressure, to give you stability, and to reduce swelling. If it feels too tight or causes pain, take it off or loosen it. We do not want the binder to interfere with circulation to the skin, which could cause blistering or skin loss! You may also remove it temporarily for laundering. Patients wear the binder for 6 weeks after surgery and some choose to wear it for several months. Let your own comfort and the amount of swelling you experience guide you. We want you as comfortable as possible without swelling.

- **Sutures**

There will be sutures around the belly button and these will be removed 10-14 days after surgery.

- **Drains**

The physician will place 1 drain into the surgical area at the time of surgery. The drain evacuates the fluid that accumulates after surgery and enables you to heal faster. When the drain is first put in place, the bulb at the end of the tube will be compressed to create gentle suction. As the fluid collects in the bulb, it will expand.

Drain Care: Secure the bulb of the drain to your clothing or the abdominal binder with a safety pin. Whenever the bulb fills or expands 50% or more, empty the bulb by opening the plug at the top and pouring out the contents. Do not attempt to remove the bulb from the tubing. Squeezing the bulb to recompress it, and put the plug back into the hole at the top in order to maintain the vacuum. If the bulb fills rapidly after emptying it, or you need to empty it more than three times a day, please call us at 859-254-5665. The physician or a nurse will remove the drains 5-10 days after surgery, when the fluid begins to turn a clear straw color and/or the amount of draining diminishes. You may shower the day after your drains are removed.

- **Tightness**

Your abdomen will feel tight for a month or longer. If you have had a muscle repair as well (the usual case), you will feel the most tightness down the center of your tummy where the physician has actually repaired your muscles. This hurts more than any other part of the procedure.

- **Healing and Sensory Nerves**

Usually, the skin around the abdomen remains partially or completely numb for several months or longer. Tingling, burning, or shooting pains indicate regeneration of the small sensory nerves. This feeling will disappear with time and is not cause for alarm. It may take as long as 2 years for sensation in your abdomen to be restored completely.

- **Swelling**

Normal postoperative swelling always occurs and will take several months to disappear completely.

- **Showering and Bathing**

You may take a “sponge bath” until directed differently by the physician. In most cases, you may begin showering and bathing after your drains are removed.

- **Activities**

Tummy tucks are probably the most uncomfortable operation we do. You will experience some pain for 10-20 days and will not feel like resuming sports or heavy exercise for at least 6 weeks. After the first 2 weeks, you may resume moderate walks for as long as it is tolerable. Too much initial activity can prolong swelling. Avoid bending, straining, or lifting during this time.

- **Diet**

If you have any postoperative nausea, carbonated sodas and dry crackers may settle the stomach. If nausea is severe, let us know as soon as possible. If you feel normal, start with liquids and bland foods, and if those are well tolerated, progress to a regular diet.

- **Smoking**

Smoking reduces capillary flow in your skin. We advise you not to smoke at all 2 weeks prior to surgery and 2 weeks after surgery.

- **Alcohol**

Alcohol dilates the blood vessels and could increase postoperative bleeding. Please do not drink until you have stopped taking the prescription pain pills, as the combination of pain pills and alcohol can be dangerous.

- **Driving**

You may resume driving if you are no longer taking pain medication within two weeks.

- **Exercise**

You may take gentle walks within a few days. Do not return to aerobic exercise strenuous exercises for six weeks. Dr. Schantz will give you clearance to increase your activities according to the progress of your recovery.

- **Sexual Activity**

You may enjoy sexual activity as your body allows with certain restrictions. (Refer to back to activity)

- **Scars**

Initially, the scars will appear red or dark pink, and they will slowly fade over a period of months to a year or more.

- **Exposure to Sunlight**

We recommend that you protect your scars from the sun for a year after surgery. Even through a bathing suit, a good deal of sunlight can reach the skin and cause damage. Wear a sunscreen with a skin-protection factor (SPF) of a least 15 when out in the sun.

- **Returning To Work**

The average person usually returns to work or to a social schedule in 2-3 weeks. However, there is considerable variation in healing and occasionally a full month is required.

- **Post Operative Appointments**

It is very important that you follow the schedule of appointments we establish after surgery.

- **Finally**

Bruising and swelling will continue to subside. Please call the office at 859-254-5665 if you experience a dramatic increase in pain, swelling, or firmness.