



SAINT JAMES
HOSPITAL

Abdominoplasty – Patient Information

An abdominoplasty (sometimes referred to as a tummy tuck), is a cosmetic surgery to improve the shape of the tummy area (abdomen).

It can involve removing excess loose skin, fat and some stretch marks and tightening the abdominal muscles.

The aim is to remove excess skin on the tummy that cannot be removed through exercise – for example, excess skin caused by pregnancy or losing a lot of weight.

It's not a quick fix for losing weight as the procedure is usually only recommended for people with a healthy body mass index (BMI).

What does an Abdominoplasty involve?

There are 4 types of abdominoplasties, and both are usually done under a general anaesthetic. This means you will be completely asleep throughout the procedure.

A mini abdominoplasty involves:

- Making a large cut (incision) across the lower tummy
- Separating the skin from the abdominal wall below the belly button
- Removing excess fat and skin
- Pulling together the remaining skin and stitching it in place

A full abdominoplasty involves:

- Making a large incision across the lower tummy, from hip to hip, just above the pubic area
- Making a second incision to free the belly button from the tissue that surrounds it
- Separating the skin from the abdominal wall
- Realigning the abdominal muscles
- Removing excess fat and skin
- Cutting a new hole for the belly button and stitching this back in place
- Pulling together the remaining skin and stitching it in place

An extended abdominoplasty:

- Is similar to a full abdominoplasty but also extends to the flanks (love handles)
- Removes more skin and fat on the sides of the waist
- Suitable for those with significant laxity after major weight loss

A Fleur-de-Lys abdominoplasty:

- Uses both a horizontal and vertical incision, creating a "T" shape.
- Removes excess skin in both horizontal and vertical directions
- Suitable for those with massive weight-loss who need additional tightening around the torso.

The surgeon will need to know if you are taking any medication that thin the blood such as aspirin, clopidogrel, warfarin or rivaroxaban or medicines that reduce your immunity or ability to heal.

The operation can take between 2 and 5 hours. Most people need to stay in hospital for a few nights.

You will probably be in some pain after you wake up from the general anaesthetic. Pain relief medication will be provided if needed.

You will leave hospital with dressings and a pressure garment (corset) on your tummy, or tummy-control pants. Someone will need to drive you home and stay with you for the following 24 hours.



SAINT JAMES
HOSPITAL

What can I expect after an Abdominoplasty?

You will need to take about 4 to 6 weeks off work and exercise. You will not be able to drive for a few weeks after the operation (your surgeon and insurance company can advise you about this).

It can take up to a year to fully recover and to see the full effect of a tummy tuck. You may note that the abdomen is flat on waking up in the morning and swells in the evening due to oedema.

You'll usually need to wear a special type of corset or tummy-control pants for 6 weeks, to encourage your skin to heal properly and to reduce any swelling. Generally, you'll need to take it easy during this time and keep your knees bent while in bed, to avoid putting strain on your stitches.

After 6 weeks you will usually be able to stop wearing a corset and may return to doing most of your usual activities.

If you are provided with a follow-up appointment with your surgeon, please ensure that you attend.

What can I expect after an Abdominoplasty?

You will have a scar running across your lower tummy and if you have a full or extended abdominoplasty, you will also have a scar around your belly button. After a Fleur-De-Lys abdominoplasty, there will be a vertical incision as well.

It's also common after an abdominoplasty to:

- Find it difficult to stand up straight – it may feel like your tummy is being pulled (this will improve over time)
- Have pain and bruising
- Feel numbness in your tummy for a few months to years
- Have a temporary fluid-filled swelling above the scar
- Have red, raised scars in the first 6 weeks which eventually fade

What can happen following an Abdominoplasty?

Abdominoplasty can occasionally result in:

- Thick, obvious scars developing
- Bulges under the skin
- "dog ears" (extra skin) at the edges of the scar
- Wounds failing to heal
- A collection of fluid in the area that was operated on
- A collection of blood underneath the skin (haematoma)
- Numbness or pain in the tummy or down the leg
- Tummy cramps or pain
- Seroma which may require aspiration with a needle and syringe.
- Recurrence of muscle diastasis (separation)
- Breathing problems

Any type of operation also carries a small risk of:

- Excessive bleeding
- Developing a blood clot in a vein
- Infection
- An allergic reaction to the anaesthetic (very rare)

The surgeon should explain how likely these risks and complications are, and how they would be treated if they happened.

Occasionally, people find the desired effect was not achieved and feel they need another operation.



SAINT JAMES
HOSPITAL

Smoking and Surgical Risks

Smoking increases the risk of complications both during and after cosmetic surgery.

Chemicals in cigarettes restrict blood vessels and reduce the amount of oxygen carried in your blood. This can affect your safety during the operation and your healing afterwards.

Risks During Surgery

Smoking can lead to:

- Reduced oxygen delivery to tissues, making the procedure riskier
- Higher risk of anaesthetic complications, including breathing difficulties
- Poor blood flow, which can affect the body's ability to tolerate the surgery
- Increased risk of skin and tissue damage during procedures that rely on good circulation

Risks After Surgery

Smoking also significantly increases the risk of:

- Delayed wound healing
- Infection at the surgical site
- Poor scarring or widened scars
- Skin or tissue loss (necrosis), especially in procedures involving skin flaps

To reduce these risks, patients are strongly **advised to stop smoking (including e-cigarettes and nicotine-containing products) for at least 6 weeks before and after surgery**. Quitting allows your circulation and oxygen levels to improve, supporting safer surgery and better healing.

What if I have concerns?

You should contact the ER or the ward, as instructed prior to discharge if you have severe pain or unexpected symptoms.

Cosmetic surgery results may not always meet your expectations. If you are not satisfied with the outcome, you can discuss this with your surgeon.