



# TUMMY TUCK

## POST OP ADVICE

### Your Recovery

A tummy tuck is surgery to remove fat and skin from your belly and to tighten the stomach muscles. It is also called an abdominoplasty. The surgery makes your belly look flatter.

Your abdomen will be sore and swollen for the first week after surgery. The skin on your stomach will be mostly numb for several weeks to months. Feeling will return slowly. You may have a small area on your lower stomach that is always numb. Do not use a heating pad on your stomach while it is still numb, or you could have severe burns. It's normal to feel tired while you are healing. It can take 5 to 6 weeks for your energy to return.

You may not be able to stand up straight when you come home. You'll need to get up and walk every day to regain your normal movement. Between walks, move your feet and legs often.

A tummy tuck leaves a long scar that will fade with time. You also may have a small scar around your belly button. The scars will be red and firm in the early phases and may take 2 years or longer to fade to the final result.

This care sheet gives you a general idea about how long it will take for you to recover. But each person recovers at a different pace. Follow the steps below to get better as quickly as possible.

### How can you care for yourself at home?

#### Activity

- Rest when you feel tired. Getting enough sleep will help you recover.
- Try to walk each day. Start by walking a little more than you did the day before. Bit by bit, increase the amount you walk. Walking boosts blood flow and helps prevent pneumonia and constipation.
- Avoid abdominal exercises and strenuous activities, such as bicycle riding, jogging, weight lifting, or aerobic exercise, for 6 to 8 weeks.
- For 6 weeks, avoid lifting anything that would make you strain. This may include heavy grocery bags and milk containers, a heavy briefcase or backpack, cat litter or dog food bags, a vacuum cleaner, or a child.
- When you can drive again is a tricky question. Legally its up to you.
- The one thing to consider is the seatbelt sits across the incision and so an emergency stop may cause problems. Bear that in mind. Our advice is to not drive for 2-3 weeks.
- Most people are able to return to work about 2 to 3 weeks after surgery. It depends on the type of work you do and how you feel. And if you drive there..
- You may shower 24 hours after surgery. Pat the incision dry. Do not take a bath for the first 2 weeks, or until your doctor tells you it is okay.
- Ask your doctor when it is okay to have sex.

## Diet

- You can eat your normal diet. If your stomach is upset, try bland, low-fat foods like plain rice, broiled chicken, toast, and yogurt.
- Drink plenty of fluids (unless your doctor tells you not to).
- You may notice that your bowel movements are not regular right after your surgery. This is common. Try to avoid constipation and straining with bowel movements. You may want to take a fibre supplement every day. If you have not had a bowel movement after a couple of days, ask your doctor about taking a mild laxative.

## Medicines

- Your doctor will tell you if and when you can restart your medicines. He or she will also give you instructions about taking any new medicines.
- If you take aspirin or some other blood thinner, ask your doctor if and when to start taking it again. Make sure that you understand exactly what your doctor wants you to do.
- Take pain medicines exactly as directed.
  - If the doctor gave you a prescription medicine for pain, take it as prescribed.
  - If you are not taking a prescription pain medicine, ask your doctor if you can take an over-the-counter medicine.
  - If you think your pain medicine is making you sick to your stomach:
  - Take your medicine after meals (unless your doctor has told you not to).
  - Ask your doctor for a different pain medicine.
  - If your doctor prescribed antibiotics, take them as directed. Do not stop taking them just because you feel better. You need to take the full course of antibiotics.

## Incision care

- If you have strips or tape on your incision, leave the tape on for a week or until it falls off. Or follow your doctor's instructions for removing the tape.
- Wash the area daily with warm, soapy water, and pat it dry.
- Keep the area clean and dry. You may cover it with a gauze bandage if it weeps or rubs against clothing. Change the dressings only as needed. We will tell you when to do so.

## Other instructions

- Hold a pillow over your incision when you cough or take deep breaths. This will support your belly and decrease your pain.
- Do breathing exercises at home as instructed by your doctor. This will help prevent pneumonia.

Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety. Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor or hospital line if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

## When should you call for help?

Call 999 anytime you think you may need emergency care. For example, call if:

- You passed out (lost consciousness).
- You have sudden chest pain and shortness of breath, or you cough up blood.
- You have severe pain in your belly.
- Call your doctor or the hospital or seek immediate medical care if:
  - You have pain that does not get better after you take pain medicine.
  - You have loose stitches, or your incision comes open.
  - You are bleeding from the incision.
  - You have signs of infection, such as:
    - Increased pain, swelling, warmth, or redness.
    - Red streaks leading from the incision.
    - Pus draining from the incision.
    - A fever.
- You have signs of a blood clot in your leg (called a deep vein thrombosis), such as:
  - Pain in your calf, back of the knee, thigh, or groin.
  - Redness and swelling in your leg or groin.
- You are sick to your stomach or cannot keep fluids down.
- Watch closely for changes in your health, and be sure to contact your doctor or nurse call line if you do not get better as expected.