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PRIVATHOSPITAL

Information on extended tummy tuck surgery (abdominoplasty)

Who is eligible for extended tummy tuck surgery?

The abdomen after major weight loss:

The skin

A major weight loss causes the skin to loosen. The abdominal skin is one of the areas most affected. This may cause physical, psychosocial or cosmetic issues.

The physical issues have to do with the skin folds and issues related to moisture, rubbing and skin infections. The typical psychosocial issues include problems with maintaining a normal sex life, issues with buying regular clothes and problems with being partially undressed in public spaces (e.g. the beach or the swimming pool).

Furthermore, there may be other problems or inconveniences that do not hinder living a normal life but simply are desired changed in regards to appearance. These issues are categorized as cosmetic issues.

The abdominal wall

Not only the skin, but also the abdominal muscles will expand with obesity. After a weight loss, the abdominal wall is still slack. When standing upright, the stomach protrudes outwards with the belly button at the top of the protrusion. For a lot of patients, strengthening the abs through exercise can help the abdominal wall tighten. For others, this is not possible as

the abs have separated from each other, and a surgical tightening of the abdominal wall is necessary.

The mons pubis

The hairy area above the genitals is called the mons pubis. When obese, this area expands considerably. After major weight loss, the mons pubis is left loose and may appear saggy. In some patients, the mons pubis remains large and voluminous after a major weight loss. Thus, the mons pubis is an area that can hold residual fat.

When can I have extended abdominal surgery?

Extended abdominal surgery is a large surgery, and can only be offered to patients who have a BMI of less than 30. This is primarily to minimize risks of complications, but also so that any later weight loss will not ruin the result of the abdominal surgery. Extended abdominal surgery can only be proceeded with when you have been weight stabile for 3 months.

Plastic surgery after bariatric surgery

Research shows that the risk of complications to plastic surgery are increased for patients who have undergone bariatric surgery, gastric by-pass e.g. As a post-bariatric patient, you can expect life-long treatment with dietary supplements, but it is very important that you take the recommended supplements such as vitamins and minerals and that you are careful to maintain a varied and healthy diet as you prepare for a plastic surgical procedure.

After bariatric surgery, a year and a half must pass before you are eligible to plastic surgical skin correction of any kind. This is because the metabolism needs to stabilize in order for the risk of complications to be minimized.

Other diseases

Obesity is associated with risk of developing diabetes and heart disease. This type of illness should be thoroughly elucidated and treated before proceeding with plastic surgery.

How is extended tummy tuck surgery carried out?

Extended tummy tuck surgery

In addition to loose skin on the stomach there will also be considerable sacking of the mons pubis after major weight loos. Some may have residual fat corresponding to the mons pubis. Because of this, the surgery is performed as so-called extended surgery, compared to regular abdominal tummy tuck surgery. The incision is made on the lowermost part of the abdomen. To the sides, the incision extends all the way to the iliac crest. In some cases, an incision is made along the midline and up past the naval towards the chest, so that the abdominal skin is also tightened on the sides. The upper part of the mons pubis is reduced and the rest is tightened. A large weight loss will also leave loose skin on the thighs. In this regard, it is beneficial to use a technique in which a strong subcutaneous fascia is lifted and attached to the abdominal wall (SFS, Superficial Fascial Suspension).

If the abs have separated along the midline, a simultaneous tightening of the abdominal wall is also performed, a so-called rectus diastesis repair. The full surgery usually takes 3 hours and demands 24 hours of hospitalization following it. A compression belt is to be worn for 6 weeks, and you should expect to take sick leave from work for 2-4 weeks.

Course of the treatment, from first consultation to follow-up

First consultation

During your first consultation, the plastic surgeon will consult with you based on your wishes and expectations to the surgery in regards to possibilities and limitations. You will receive information about what is realistic to expect after the surgery and what consequences and risks the surgery or surgeries may entail.

Your body is meticulously photographed for “before and after” photos, if the surgery is eventually carried out.

As a private patient you have the right to bring an assessor with you to your consultation, and we advise you do so. This provides you with an opportunity to discuss pros and

cons for the surgery even after you have returned home. Danish legislation on “cosmetic treatment” requires that you wait a minimum of seven days from your first consultation before you can make an appointment for the desired surgery. This serves to protect you by preventing any impulsive or rash decisions to undergo cosmetic surgery. Patient referred from a public hospital are not bound by this legislation, but are advised to take the same precautions.

The surgery

An extended tummy tuck surgery is performed under general anesthesia. Before any surgery under full anesthesia you are to be fasting for a minimum of 6 hours before the surgery, but you can drink water up until 2 hours before the surgery.

When you arrive, the nurse in the hospital ward will greet you, validate your identity and show you your room.. The anesthesiologist will explain the anesthesia to you, and your plastic surgeon will make the guiding marks on your body and ensure that you agree and consent to the plan.

When the surgery is over, you will be equipped with a compression belt.

After the surgery

After the surgery you are transferred to the recovery room where the anesthetist nurse or the anesthesiologist monitors and observes you until you are fully awake. In the recovery room, pain-relieving treatment is initiated. Nausea can also be treated if needed. When you are fully awake you are escorted back to your room in the ward. The plastic surgeon then comes to see you and inform you about the course of the operation.

For extended tummy tuck surgery you will be hospitalized for a minimum of 24 hours. You can purchase an additional day of hospital admission if it makes you feel safer. The abdominal compression belt must be worn for 6 weeks after the operation. During the first 3 weeks it is to be worn both day and night, and during the last 3 weeks only while you are on your feet during the day.

After 3 weeks you will return to the hospital for a check-up with the nurse who will also remove the stitches. An absorbable thread is used for the surgery, but the thread ends of the stitches are to be removed manually.

Follow-up

A final consultation with your plastic surgeon is scheduled 3 months after the surgery. At this point, the result of the surgery can be evaluated, and new photos will be taken for documentation.

Subsequent effects

Scars

Figuratively speaking, loose skin is traded for scars. The larger the corrected area is, the longer the scar. During the first three months, the scars are red and swollen, but after this period they slowly lighten and flatten. It is recommended to use a band-aid as long as the scars continue to be red. This decreases the scars' tendency to redden and swell. It takes up to two years before the final result of the scars can be evaluated.

Temporary swelling

In the weeks after the surgery there will be swelling of the operated area. This will fade away on its own. In the weeks after the surgery you must wear the compression belt in order to reduce swelling.

Pain

Extended tummy tuck surgery is not associated with any significant pain issues. Most of the pain stems from the tightening of the abdominal wall, (rectus diastasis correction surgery) if this has been performed. Following tightening of the abdominal wall, using the abdominal muscles will cause considerable soreness. In rare cases, the pain may be of a more permanent character, because a nerve has been caught in a bit of scar tissue.

Numbing

Especially with extensive plastic surgery, several sensory nerves in the skin will be affected. This means that a triangular area of skin from the scar up to the belly button will be left with permanent numbness. This can be quite bothersome, especially right after the surgery. With time, patients get used to the numbness, and so that it does not cause inconvenience in the everyday life.

Complications

Generally, the risk of complications is large in plastic surgery after major weight loss. Thus, 30% experience smaller complications that can be treated with ambulatory care, and 10% experience complications that require surgery.

Bleeding

After the surgery, the blood pressure increases. When this happens, one of the small blood vessels that have been cut during the surgery may burst and cause bleeding under the skin. In the case of larger bleedings, it is necessary to operate again. If this does happen, it is most likely while you are still hospitalized, and re-operation is initiated immediately by your plastic surgeon.

Infections

Infections are caused by bacteria that may have infected the wound during the surgery, or more commonly have come into the wound through the new scar after you have returned to your home. For most cases, the infection in the scar is superficial; this can be treated by topical treatment and oral antibiotics. In rare cases, the infection can spread and make it necessary to open up or drain the scar during re-admittance to the hospital and intravenous antibiotic treatment. In severe cases, the infection can ruin the expected result of the operation.

Poor healing

With any larger plastic surgical procedure, there is a risk of poor healing causing parts of the scar to open. This defect is typically treated ”conservatively” and heals from the bottom

and outwards. The scar may appear wide and ugly in the affected area, and if this is the case you will be offered a scar correction (about a year after the surgery). In difficult cases it can be necessary to try closing the scar under the cover of antibiotics.

Fluid accumulation and edema

In the area where the skin has been detached from the muscles beneath, fluid may accumulation after the surgery. This is called edema. The body absorbs any fluid from smaller areas with edema, but if larger amounts of fluid accumulate, it may be necessary to drain the fluid during an ambulatory visit. In very rare cases, it is necessary to proceed with another surgery to prevent the fluid from reappearing.

Dead tissue (skin necrosis)

If the skin is tightened too much, or in the event of complications such as larger bleeding or infections, the blood circulation in the operated area is critically reduced. Fat tissue is very sensitive to low blood flow and dead fat tissue leaves a so-called fat-necrosis, which forms a hard lump that is sometimes sore and may be worrisome for the patient. Skin necrosis is very rare, but it requires a second operation to remove the dead skin, which may have great consequences for the aesthetic result.

Hypertrophic scarring

Some patients have a tendency to produce a lot of scar tissue after surgeries: So-called hypertrophic scarring. All scars are red and swollen during the months after the surgery, but with hypertrophic scarring, the scars remain red and swollen for more than a year after the surgery. The scars are treated with band-aids for several months and may also be injected with steroid if the hypertrophy is severe. In rare cases, a disfiguring scar may be surgically corrected.

Hypertrophic scarring is different from keloid, which is an inherent disease in which scar tissue extends into the operated area. Patients with this condition are advised not to have cosmetic surgery.

Venous thrombosis

In a large surgeries, there is a small risk of blood clotting in the legs, so-called venous thrombosis. This in itself is not dangerous, as the blood clots are formed in the venous system. However, if such a blood clot loosens and flows with the blood circulation towards the lung, a life-threatening pulmonary embolism can occur.

Durability

Tightening the skin and the underlying tissue does not stop the aging process. As such, there are no cosmetic surgeries of this type that "last forever". On the other hand, it can be argued that what is removed will not be reproduced or reappear. Reoccurring overweight and weight loss will also cause more looseness of the skin.

The "durability" is individual and affected by genetic factors as well as external factors that may have affected the skin's laxity (e.g. hormones, smoking) The "durability" will also be different depending on the type of surgery and in the sense that the more extensive the surgery, the greater the effect and the long-term durability of the result.