PRINTZLAU

PRIVATHOSPITAL

Information on upper arm lift surgery (brachioplasty)

With age, the skin loses its elasticity. Weight loss and loss of muscle volume with age will also cause skin laxity, especially on the arms. Major weight loss and genetics can cause significant looseness of the skin on the arms, even at a young age.

How is an arm lift performed?

There are many techniques for tightening the skin on the upper arms. Depending on the extent of the issue, the incision can be made in different ways and different amounts of skin can be removed. Typically, in mild cases, a shorter incision is made towards the armpit, but in most cases the incision is made along the inside of the upper arm from the armpit to the elbow. In purely cosmetic surgeries, the incision and thus the scar is placed along the innermost edge of the biceps. When removing larger amount of skin, the incision is placed closer to the backside of the upper arm.

In addition to the skin removal, liposuction is often performed during arm lift surgery. In cosmetic surgeries, liposuction will improve the aesthetic result, but during larger arm lift surgeries, liposuction is performed in order to spare the small lymphatic vessels and prevent subsequent swelling tendency in the lower arms and hands.

Plastic surgery after bariatric surgery

Research shows that the risk of complications to plastic surgery is 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.

Arm lift – the course from consultation to follow-up

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. If you are a good candidate for arm lift surgery, the plastic surgeon and you will determine what type of surgery is best suited for you. You will receive information about what is realistic to expect after the surgery and what consequences and risks the surgery may entail. The plastic surgeon will assess your overall health and whether it is necessary to draw blood samples or any further examinations before the surgery. Your arms are meticulously photographed for "before and after" photos, if the operation 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 arm lift is performed during hospitalization and under general anesthesia. Small arm lifts can be done under local anesthesia, but full anesthesia is generally recommended as this provides the best conditions for achieving optimal results. 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 special compression sleeves that you will also be wearing during the post-operative weeks.

Outcomes and results

Scars

The scars are the major downside to an arm lift. The scars are located along the arms which unfortunately involves a tendency for the scars to widen. During the first 3 months the scars are red and swollen before they slowly begin to lighten and flatten. It may be a full 2 years before the final result of the scars can be assessed.

Temporary swelling of the underarms and hands

It is common for the underarms and hands to swell after an arm lift. It may be several weeks before the swelling has disappeared completely. It is important that you keep your arms above heart level when possible (arms laying on pillows at night). In severe cases an elastic compression glove can be worn and if needed, massage and physiotherapy can be helpful.

Complications

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 leak and cause bleeding under the skin. In the case of larger bleedings, it is necessary to operate again. If this happens, it is most likely while you are still hospitalized, and a new surgery is initiated immediately by your plastic surgeon.

Infection

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. In most cases, the infection of the scar is superficial; this can be treated by topical 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 surgery.

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.

Lymphoedema

In very rare cases long-lasting swelling of the underarms and hands can occur. This condition requires treatment with compression gloves and special physiotherapy. In most patients, the swelling will subside and with time disappear completely.

Nerve damage

During the surgery, the sensory nerves of the skin can be damaged. This causes numbness of the affected area on the arm. This condition is bothersome but it does not have any influence on arm mobility.

Hypertrophic scarring

Some patients produce a lot of scar tissue, so-called hypertrophic scarring. This condition causes thickened red scars. The scars can be treated with band-aids over the course of several months, and in severe cases with steroid injection. In rare cases, it can be attempted to surgically correct a disfiguring scar.

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. Figuratively speaking, the aging process is “parallel shifted” in a younger direction.

The “durability” of the long-term result is partly individual and is affected by genetic factors as well as external factors, e.g. smoking.