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BODY CONTOURING AFTER MASSIVE WEIGHT LOSS

Patient Information Leaflet

Losing a significant amount of weight is a major achievement and can result in substantial improvements in health and quality of life. However, after significant weight loss, the skin and supporting tissues may not fully retract to your new body shape.

This can leave loose or hanging skin around the abdomen, waist, back, buttocks, thighs, breasts and arms. In some patients, excess skin may also cause discomfort, difficulty with clothing or exercise, skin irritation and hygiene problems.

Body contouring surgery after massive weight loss refers to a group of operations designed to remove this excess skin, reshape the underlying tissues and improve the overall proportions of the body.

WHAT IS A BODY LIFT?

A body lift removes loose skin and, where appropriate, excess fatty tissue from one or more areas of the body.

A **lower body lift**, sometimes called a circumferential body lift or belt lipectomy, typically treats the:

- Abdomen
- Waist and flanks
- Lower back
- Buttocks
- Outer thighs

The incision generally extends around the lower trunk, allowing excess skin to be removed circumferentially and the tissues of the abdomen, thighs and buttocks to be lifted and reshaped.

Not every patient requires a complete lower body lift. Your operation will be individually planned according to where your excess skin is situated and what you would most like to improve.

WHAT AREAS CAN BE TREATED?

Body contouring after significant weight loss may involve one or several procedures.

Abdomen

An **abdominoplasty (tummy tuck)** removes excess abdominal skin and fat. The abdominal muscles may also be tightened where appropriate.

Patients with a large overhanging fold of skin may require removal of the excess abdominal apron.

Lower Body Lift

A lower body lift treats excess skin around the entire lower trunk. It can improve the abdomen, waist, lower back, buttocks and outer thighs simultaneously.

Thigh Lift

A thigh lift removes excess skin from the thighs. Depending on the pattern of skin excess, this may involve the inner thigh, outer thigh or both.

Arm Lift

A **brachioplasty**, or arm lift, removes loose skin from the upper arms.

Breast Surgery

Significant weight loss can leave the breasts deflated or drooping. Treatment may involve:

- Breast lift (mastopexy)
- Breast reduction
- Breast augmentation

- A combination of lift and augmentation

Upper Body or Back Lift

Excess folds of skin around the upper back, chest or bra-line can be removed and tightened where necessary.

Liposuction

Liposuction may sometimes be combined with skin-removal surgery to improve contour. However, liposuction alone cannot adequately correct significant loose skin.

DO ALL THE PROCEDURES HAPPEN AT ONCE?

Not necessarily.

After massive weight loss, several areas may require treatment. Performing every operation at the same time may result in an excessively long operation and increase surgical risk.

For this reason, body contouring is often performed **in stages**.

Your surgical plan will take into account:

- The areas causing you the greatest concern
- Your general health
- Your previous operations
- The amount and distribution of excess skin
- The expected duration of surgery
- Your recovery requirements
- Your priorities and goals

Your surgeon will discuss which areas can safely and appropriately be treated during the same operation.

WHO IS SUITABLE FOR BODY CONTOURING SURGERY?

You may be a suitable candidate if you:

- Have achieved significant weight loss
- Have maintained a relatively stable weight

- Have troublesome loose or hanging skin
- Are in good general health
- Do not smoke or vape
- Have realistic expectations regarding the results and scars
- Can maintain adequate nutrition and a healthy lifestyle

Body contouring surgery is **not a weight-loss procedure**. Ideally, your weight should have stabilised before surgery so that further major weight changes do not compromise your result.

NUTRITION AFTER MASSIVE WEIGHT LOSS

Good nutrition is particularly important before body contouring surgery.

Patients who have undergone bariatric surgery or experienced substantial weight loss may occasionally have nutritional deficiencies.

Depending on your medical history, your surgeon may request blood tests or further medical assessment before surgery.

It is important to follow a balanced diet with adequate protein and to take any nutritional supplements prescribed by your treating healthcare team.

SMOKING AND VAPING

Smoking and nicotine significantly interfere with blood flow to healing tissues and can increase the risk of wound-healing complications.

You must inform your surgeon if you:

- Smoke cigarettes
- Vape nicotine
- Use nicotine replacement products
- Use any other nicotine-containing products

You will be advised when these need to be stopped before and after surgery.

WHAT HAPPENS DURING SURGERY?

Body lift procedures are usually performed under **general anaesthesia**.

The exact operation depends on the areas being treated.

Your surgeon will carefully mark the excess tissue before surgery. Incisions are positioned to allow adequate removal of loose skin while attempting to place scars in areas that can be concealed beneath underwear or clothing whenever possible.

Excess skin and fat are removed, the remaining tissues are lifted and reshaped, and the wounds are carefully closed.

Drains may be placed beneath the skin to remove fluid during the early healing period.

WHERE WILL MY SCARS BE?

Body contouring surgery after massive weight loss requires **significant scars**.

This is an important trade-off: improved shape and removal of loose skin are achieved by exchanging excess skin for permanent scars.

The position and length of your scars depend on the procedure being performed.

For a circumferential lower body lift, the scar commonly extends around the waist or lower trunk. Your surgeon will usually attempt to position this so that much of it can be concealed beneath underwear or swimwear.

Other procedures will result in scars appropriate to the area being treated, for example:

- Abdomen – across the lower abdomen
- Arms – along the inner or back aspect of the upper arm
- Inner thighs – within the groin and sometimes extending down the inner thigh
- Breasts – around the areola and potentially vertically down the breast and within the breast crease
- Upper back – within or close to the bra-line

Scars are initially more visible and usually soften and fade gradually with time, although they will never disappear completely.

WHAT CAN I EXPECT AFTER SURGERY?

The recovery following a body lift is generally more significant than following smaller body contouring procedures.

Immediately after surgery, you can expect:

- Swelling
- Bruising
- Tightness
- Discomfort
- Temporary changes in skin sensation
- Dressings over the wounds
- Possible surgical drains
- A compression garment where appropriate

Compression garments may be used to support the operated areas and reduce swelling during recovery.

You will be encouraged to begin gentle mobilisation soon after surgery. Early walking is important during recovery and helps reduce complications associated with prolonged immobility.

HOW LONG IS THE RECOVERY?

Recovery varies considerably depending on the procedure or combination of procedures performed.

You should expect to take time away from work and arrange adequate assistance at home, particularly during the early recovery period.

You will initially need to avoid:

- Heavy lifting
- Strenuous exercise
- Running
- Gym training
- Repetitive bending or stretching
- Activities that place tension on the surgical wounds

You will gradually return to normal activities as healing progresses.

Your surgeon will advise you when it is safe to return to work, drive, exercise and resume unrestricted activity.

Swelling can take several months to settle completely, and the final contour continues to mature over time.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS?

Body contouring after massive weight loss is major surgery, and complications can occur despite appropriate care.

Potential risks include:

- Bleeding or haematoma
- Infection
- Seroma or fluid collection
- Delayed wound healing
- Wound separation
- Skin or fat necrosis
- Unfavourable or widened scars
- Asymmetry
- Persistent swelling
- Altered or reduced skin sensation
- Contour irregularities
- Residual skin laxity
- Recurrent skin looseness with future weight changes
- Persistent pain
- Need for further surgery or scar revision
- Anaesthetic complications
- Deep vein thrombosis (DVT)
- Pulmonary embolism (PE)

Large body contouring procedures have more extensive wounds and therefore require careful postoperative monitoring and follow-up.

Your individual risks will be discussed with you during your consultation.

WILL I NEED DRAINS?

Drains are commonly used following some body lift procedures, although this depends on the operation and surgical technique.

A drain is a small tube placed beneath the skin to remove fluid that would otherwise accumulate around the surgical area.

If drains are used, you will be shown how to look after them and they will be removed once your surgeon feels this is appropriate.

WHAT RESULTS CAN I EXPECT?

The aim of surgery is to remove excess skin and improve the shape and proportions of the body.

You may notice a substantial improvement in contour immediately, although swelling will initially obscure the final result.

The tissues continue to soften and settle over the following months, and scars continue to mature for considerably longer.

It is important to understand that surgery cannot:

- Produce perfect symmetry
- Completely remove all stretch marks
- Eliminate every contour irregularity
- Remove all excess skin without significant scars
- Prevent future ageing or skin laxity
- Prevent changes caused by future weight gain or weight loss

Maintaining a stable weight and healthy lifestyle will help preserve your result.

WILL MY SKIN BECOME LOOSE AGAIN?

Some relaxation of the tissues naturally occurs with time.

Significant future weight loss or weight gain may alter your result and may cause further skin laxity.

For this reason, it is preferable to undergo body contouring surgery once you have reached a weight that you feel able to maintain.

WILL I NEED MORE THAN ONE OPERATION?

Quite possibly.

Patients who have experienced massive weight loss frequently have loose skin affecting multiple areas of the body.

Body contouring should therefore be considered a **journey rather than a single operation**.

Your surgeon will work with you to develop a staged treatment plan based on:

1. Your priorities
2. Your anatomy
3. Your health and surgical risk
4. The safest combination of procedures
5. The recovery required between stages

YOUR CONSULTATION

During your consultation, your surgeon will assess:

- Your weight-loss history
- Whether your weight has stabilised
- Previous bariatric or abdominal surgery
- Your general medical health
- Medications and supplements
- Smoking or nicotine use
- The amount and distribution of excess skin
- Existing scars
- Your nutritional status where relevant
- Your goals and expectations

Photographs may be taken as part of your confidential medical record.

Your surgeon will then recommend an individualised surgical plan and explain the expected scars, recovery, benefits, limitations and risks.

IMPORTANT

This leaflet provides general information and does not replace your consultation with your plastic surgeon.

Every patient is different, and the exact operation, expected recovery and potential risks will depend on your anatomy, previous surgery, general health and the procedures being considered.

Please ask any questions you may have before proceeding with surgery.

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