Post Operative Instructions Following Abdominoplasty

What will I see when I look into a mirror?
If you had full abdominal contouring it will be difficult to stand up straight for several days, and your abdomen will feel tight.

The contour of your abdomen will not take its final shape for several months after the surgery. You may have dark discoloration from dry blood at your incision and this is normal. The belly button incision may develop some crusting that is dried fluid. This is normal and will be cleaned at your first post-op visit.

When can I shower or take a bath?
You can shower after your surgery when you feel up to it using a mild fragrance free soap such as Ivory or Dove. You may remove the binder and gauze to shower. It is OK to let the water run directly over the incisions. Your incisions are sealed with glue and tape. There may be some slight bleeding while the glue is drying leading to a dark appearance under the glue.

Avoid using very hot water. Your abdomen will be tender, so wash this area gently and pat dry with a clean towel. Allow the area to fully dry before putting on the dressings and binder. Do not bath in a bathtub until instructed by the doctor.

How do I care for my drains and incisions?
See attached care sheet for drains. Your drains are held in place with stitches to your skin and should always be supported to avoid pulling on the drain.

Apply Neosporin and dry gauze to the drain exit site. Change this daily.

DO NOT put the drain bulb or tubing under the binder. This can cause the skin to die.

The easiest method is to safety pin the drain bulb to your abdominal support or clothing. When you shower, you may temporarily “hang” the drain bulb around a lanyard. The “How to care for your drain” pamphlet has more detailed information. Drains are generally removed within 2-3 weeks after your surgery.
Apply fluffy gauze along the incision line under the binder. This prevents rubbing of the incision/tapes.

The belly button can be cleaned with soap and water or peroxide. You should gently place a wick of clean gauze into the belly button with a Q Tip. This should be repeated daily.

**Should I wear an abdominal support?**
Yes, we recommend that you wear an abdominal support garment for 12 weeks following your surgery removing the garment only for showering. You will have a binder applied directly after surgery. You should wear this binder for the first several weeks. About 4-6 weeks after surgery, you can start to wear other support garments that can be purchased on line if you wish.

Most patients find that a spandex or Lycra waist and tummy shaping garment is most comfortable to wear. We will advise you of your garment options before surgery and again at you post-operative visits. Whatever you choose, it should be easy and comfortable for you to put on and remove. After 12 weeks you may discontinue all support garments.

**What can I do after surgery?**
I would like you to walk in a flexed position for the first week. You should sleep in a flexed position for the first week. You should sleep on your back only. Some find that a recliner is the best way of doing this. You will gradually be able to stand upright over the second week. You should walk every day but have someone assist you for the first few days. You should not lift anything heavier than 5 pounds or participate in heavy exercise for six weeks after the surgery.

After six weeks, gradually return to you normal activities and exercise routines. Depending on the type of work you do, you should be able to return to your job as soon as you are comfortable. If your job does not require heavy activity, you should be able to go back to work in 2-3 weeks. Hernia repair patients are to check with the surgeon regarding additional restrictions.

**When can I drive?**
You generally should be able to drive about five to seven days after surgery if you feel up to it. You should never drive if you are still taking any pain medication other than Tylenol.

**How much pain will I have?**
The most discomfort that you will have lasts three to five days, sometimes a little longer. As you feel more comfortable, your need for medication will be less.

**What medications should I use?**
Your surgeon will prescribe a pain medication for you and may also have you take an antibiotic. Follow the directions on the bottle for their use. The pain medication will make you feel drowsy. Have someone assist you in your home and do not attempt to drive while you are taking the pain medication. A few days after surgery most patients will find that Tylenol will take care of the discomfort. Do not use aspirin or ibuprofen (Motrin) for five days after the surgery.
It is very common to have constipation after this type of surgery, especially after taking pain medications. You are encouraged to take Colace twice daily which can be purchased over the counter. Natural and synthetic fiber should be used. Other over the counter medications can be used, and if all else fails, a glycerin suppository can be effective. It is good to be proactive in the use of fiber, as you do not want to strain and disrupt your abdominal wall tightening.

**Can I drink alcohol?**
Do not drink alcohol for five days after your surgery or while taking narcotic pain medicines.

**When will I be seen in the office after surgery?**
You will normally be seen in the office within one week of your surgery and then at about two weeks, six weeks, and six months after surgery to monitor healing. Additional appointments may be necessary.

**How will I know if I am having a problem?**
Urgent problems after abdominoplasty do not occur frequently. These are the complications that will require a change in your post-operative care:

- **Hematoma** (blood collecting under your incisions) can occur within a few days of your surgery. The warning signs are:
  - Severe pain that does not respond to medication
  - Significant swelling in your abdomen
  - Excessive or growing bruising

- **Infection** is rare following abdominoplasty. It is normal to have a small amount of drainage from the incisions and around your belly button for a few days. Signs of infection are:
  - Increased temperature
  - Increasing drainage from the incisions
  - Increasing redness around the incisions

- **Leg swelling** with or without associated pain may indicate a problem with the vein circulation in your leg(s). Although some swelling is to be expected due to your surgery, intravenous fluids given to you during the surgery, and your decreased level of activity, this swelling is normally mild, painless and affects both legs evenly. If you have a large amount of leg swelling (either one or both legs) or if you experience pain in your legs contact the office immediately.

- **Breathing problems** after abdominoplasty are rare but can be a serious complication. If you develop any chest and/or back pain or the feeling of being short of breath you must contact the office or be seen in the nearest emergency medical facility without delay.

- **Medication reactions** may occur with the drugs prescribed for you. If you develop a skin rash, itching, vomiting, or diarrhea, stop taking your medication and contact the office.

If you have any of the above problems or other questions, contact our office. If you are having an emergency call 911 or go to the nearest Emergency Department.