



SPECIALIST COSMETIC SURGERY

Abdominoplasty for men

What is it?

This is an exciting time in cosmetic surgery, with many new techniques now available. Having gained his expertise in the full range of these techniques from prominent surgeons in the field, Dr. Beldholm now customises his operations to provide every patient with the best possible results. And he is well aware how different the requirements of men and women patients can be, with most men requesting a “washboard” stomach with straight flanks, while women generally want an hourglass waist and flatter abdomen.

Abdominoplasty (or tummy tuck) refers to the moulding or reshaping of the abdomen.

Many abdominoplasty patients find that their operation provides significant psychological and emotional benefits as well as greatly improving their appearance.

Who can benefit from this operation?

Although the majority of abdominoplasty patients are women, men are increasingly seeking this treatment.

In youth, the skin of the abdomen is tight and the abdominal muscles firm, producing a flat and attractive physique. Any condition putting outwards stress on these tissues stretches the abdomen, resulting in loose skin and separation of the abdominal muscles.

Those who have lost a lot of weight can benefit greatly from this procedure. After extensive weight loss, particularly as we age, there can be loose skin left, as well as separated abdominal muscles.

Although Dr Belholm can reduce and tighten overweight patients' abdomens, the benefits are not great. Options for these patients include liposuction or a laparoscopic banding operation (Dr Belholm can recommend an excellent surgeon). For those who are prepared to lose weight, there are many techniques that can improve appearance. For further information, please refer to the Body contouring after massive weight loss section.

Surgical technique and results

As every person is unique – not only in body shape but also in desires and expectations – Dr. Beldholm works out a personal plan with each patient. Having expertise in a wide range of techniques, this plan may include liposuction, a mini or full abdominoplasty or a major circumferential body lift.

Except for liposuction, all abdominoplasties require an incision and, consequently, there will always be a scar. The size of the scar will depend upon the amount of skin to be removed. This scar is usually placed low down so that briefs will cover it and it generally fades over 12 months. If there is a lot of skin to remove, then the belly button will also need to be moved to optimise the result, resulting in a small amount of scarring around it.

In a full abdominoplasty procedure, an incision is made across the lower abdomen that extends laterally. Another incision is made around the belly button to free the surrounding skin before it is separated from the abdominal wall. The abdominal muscles are tightened to create a stronger abdominal wall and a smaller waist. Excess skin is removed, and a new, centrally placed opening is made for the belly button. In most cases, Dr. Beldholm will also perform liposuction as part of the procedure to make sure that the best possible results are obtained. A special stitch that does not need to be removed (and has been shown to improve the final result) will then be used to close the wound.

To optimise your safety and the results of your operation, Dr. Beldholm performs the majority of these operations in a modern, accredited hospital with the assistance of a specialised anaesthetist. The final result takes around six months to be apparent. This is because it takes time for swelling after the surgery to settle down as well as the full effect of the liposuction to be seen. The scar should fade to become a fine line after six months although, occasionally, it can take up to 12 months. The final result should be an attractive physique with a scar that is easily hidden.

Effects of surgery and side effects

Although abdominoplasty is major surgery, most problems will settle over a few weeks after the operation and minor problems are easily treated. Please note that in Dr. Beldholm's hands serious problems are uncommon. Even long scars will heal and only leave a fine, thin line over a few months. This is because Dr. Beldholm places all his incisions in the natural tension lines of the skin. However, complications can happen -- no matter how skilled a surgeon is.

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General risks of abdominoplasty

As with any surgical procedure, patients can suffer a number of complications unrelated to their specific operations. However, for those who are healthy and do not take any medications, these complications are very rare.

The risks increase for those with a number of health problems and can include:

- Heart problems (although very uncommon with modern anaesthetic techniques).
- Lung problems -- small areas of the lungs may collapse, increasing the risk of chest infection. Such problems may require antibiotics and physiotherapy to correct. Other potential lung complications are quite rare.
- Clots in the legs with pain and swelling. Rarely, part of such a clot may break off and go to the lungs, causing fatal complications.
- Allergic reactions to medications.

Specific risks of abdominoplasty

In Dr. Beldholm's experience, the majority of patients spend one to two nights in hospital. Although almost all Dr Beldholm's patients are very happy with their final results, abdominoplasty has the highest complication rate amongst cosmetic operations, reported to be up to 20 per cent of all procedures.

Wound infection is perhaps the most common complication. Such infections, which generally respond well to antibiotics, are usually superficial.

Smoking

Patients are advised that smoking before an abdominoplasty will increase complication rates threefold.

During abdominoplasty, a large area under the skin is undermined and the blood supply to the skin depends on blood vessels that are very far from the site of healing. This blood supply is very tenuous, even in a young person with no health problems who does not smoke. After surgery, it has been shown that the blood supply to the abdominal flap is reduced to only 10 per cent of the normal blood supply. Nicotine, carbon monoxide, and many other toxic tobacco by-products clearly interfere with the dynamics of normal wound repair.

Their adverse effects can include:

- Causing direct tissue injury within the microvasculature (network of tiny blood vessels).
- Inhibiting cellular populations involved in propagating healing.
- Producing hormones that actually retard wound repair.
- Reducing blood flow and oxygen delivery to the skin and extremities.
- Necrosis (skin death).

To optimise your surgical results, Dr. Beldholm requests patients stop smoking for four weeks before and four weeks after surgery. These recommendations are based on conclusive medical findings. **Nicotine patches or gum should not be used to take the place of cigarettes or cigars as they are also associated with increased complications.**

Cosmetic effects of the operation

- The length of the incision will depend upon the extent of loose skin. In the majority of cases, this incision fades and eventually becomes a thin line. However, there can be some widening of the scar over time. This is particularly common in the middle of the scar where the blood supply and tensions are the highest.
- When a large amount of skin is removed, there is commonly a slightly raised area on the side of the incision, referred to as a "dog ear". Dr. Beldholm will minimise this by performing liposuction in this area and also by using a special abdominoplasty technique. Although this slightly raised area will reduce over time, it is not possible to completely eliminate it.
- As most people are not completely symmetrical, there is a risk that the operation can exacerbate any contour irregularity. Liposuction can also sometimes cause slight irregularities of the contour of the skin
- Although the navel is meant to be a mid-line structure, sometimes it is not located where it should be. For patients with

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this problem, their navels will be repositioned during abdominoplasty. Although this can look strange at first, the majority of patients quickly adjust to this new look.

Common effects of surgery

- The level of pain and tenderness after the operation will vary from one patient to another. In rare cases, patients may experience severe pain and swelling.
- As tissues and nerves repair, the presence of tenderness around the operated area cannot be avoided.
- Temporary numbness in the lower abdomen. As surgery involves cutting across nerves supplying sensation to the skin, there will usually be some temporary numbness which usually settles down within one to two months. In rare cases the numbness may be permanent.
- Possible swelling around the operation site and genital area. The genitals may also appear bruised. The swelling will take a couple of months to completely resolve (this is why the final result of the procedure is not apparent for some time).

Common complications

- Wound infection is perhaps the most common complication. Such infections, which generally respond well to antibiotics, are usually superficial.
- Possible small areas of wound breakdown. With regular wound dressings, these heal well over a few weeks.

Uncommon and rare complications

As with every surgical procedure or operation, there are always risks and, in very extreme cases, fatalities. Serious complications of an abdominoplasty can include:

- Haematoma or excessive bleeding. Copious bleeding may require a return to theatre to remove the blood and seal the blood vessels.
- Seroma or excessive fluid build-up under the skin of the operated area. Occasionally this requires drainage with a needle although it usually settles down without any further operations.
- Fat necrosis occurs when fat cells lose blood flow and die. These dead cells then harden over time underneath the skin, sometimes becoming lumpy.
- Poor wound healing (hypertrophic or keloid scar). In these instances, the scar can permanently thicken, turn red, be painful and disfiguring. Usually it takes up to 12 months for a wound to heal and demonstrate the final result. Please be aware that, with Dr Beldholm's techniques, scars are minimised.
- Necrosis (skin death) generally occurs in patients who continue smoking before their operations. With necrosis, there is an open wound in the lower part of the abdomen. If dressed daily, this wound heals within a couple of months and the final results are usually quite acceptable.
- Chronic pain (pain more than 12 months after surgery) is sometimes caused by scar tissue forming around nerves.
- Stitch sinus involves an infection around the permanent stitches holding the abdominal muscles together. As the stitch is permanent, it acts like a foreign body and will need to be removed. Patients may note a discharging pit on the skin with this condition, which is very rare.
- The possibility of injury to bowel and abdominal structures when putting in stitches that bring the abdominal muscles together. Although Dr. Beldholm has never had this complication in his practice, it is described in medical literature.
- Additional procedures may be needed after an abdominoplasty has been performed.

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Before Surgery

A well-balanced diet

Dr. Beldholm's approach to your health is holistic. If you are contemplating elective cosmetic surgery, then the first thing you can do for yourself is to have a well-balanced, healthy diet. Maintaining such a diet is central to preparing for any type of surgery as proper nutrition assists healing and strengthens the immune system, resulting in a faster recovery.

Take one multivitamin a day. Please ensure the multivitamin contains vitamin C (which improves wound healing) but does NOT contain vitamin E. It is important that you avoid vitamin E intake for about two weeks prior to undergoing surgery as it can interfere with blood clotting. Under normal circumstances this vitamin helps decrease an individual's likelihood of contracting heart disease, but in the context of surgery it can lead to haemorrhaging. Almonds and wheat germ, as well as vegetable oils made from sunflower, almonds or wheat germ, are particularly high in vitamin E, so avoid these for two weeks before your surgery.

Regular Exercise

Regular exercise is helpful in preparing for abdominoplasty surgery. Exercising increases metabolic rates and builds muscle mass, which assists in preventing weight gain during the recovery time. As a strong heart promotes a faster immune response (thereby speeding up healing), plenty of aerobic exercise should be included in fitness regimes.

Although some medications should be stopped prior to this operation, it's important to always check with your GP first.

Two weeks prior to surgery: Stop vitamin E intake. As wheat germ, nuts and vegetable oils containing sunflower, almonds or wheat germ contain the highest amounts of vitamin E, avoid these for two weeks before your surgery.

Seven days prior to your operation: Stop taking aspirin, clopidogrel (eg. Plavix, Iscover), dipyridamole (eg Asasantin, Persantin) and NSAIDs (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs). The use of some forms of post-cancer treatment medication may also involve an increased risk of complications during or after surgery. Use of these types of medications may produce an increased risk of developing dangerous internal blood clots.

Five days prior: Stop taking warfarin medications (Coumadin, Marevan). However, for high risk patients, stopping warfarin can lead to life-threatening blood clots and daily injections with low molecular weight heparin may be required. High risk patients most commonly include those with artificial heart valves or those who have suffered myocardial infarctions. Your GP can advise if you are in the high risk category. Low risk patients stopping warfarin may require no course of action.

Stop eating at least six (6) hours before your procedure. However, you may continue drinking water and clear apple juice (and only clear apple juice) up to two (2) hours prior to your procedure. Shower on the morning of your operation and remove your watch and all jewellery. Although valuables are looked after during your procedure, the hospital does not accept responsibility for these items, so it's best to only bring necessities. Your own medication can be taken with a sip of water on the morning of surgery. However, it's important to check with Dr Beldholm regarding what medications can be taken well before your operation. Please bring anti-embolic stockings and your own medications to the hospital.

After Surgery

Following an abdominoplasty, the majority of patients spend one to two days in hospital. When discharged, you will still be in the recovery phase of the operation and will need to arrange for someone to drive you home and assist you for the first week.

Dr. Beldholm administers local anaesthetic into patients' wounds to minimise pain and generally they are very comfortable when they wake. Prior to discharge, you'll receive a script for pain medication that can be taken at home. Dr. Beldholm sees all patients prior to discharge to ensure they are well enough to leave.

Patients are encouraged to walk as soon as possible after their operations to prevent complications and to ensure blood flow quickly returns to normal. To avoid the abdominal wound being strained, patients need to walk slightly bent forward.

A compression garment will be applied in theatre before you wake. You should leave this on until reviewed in Dr. Beldholm's rooms five to seven days after the operation. At this stage your abdominal binder and dressings will be taken down and you will have your first look at the results and your wound will be redressed. You will then be reviewed several times over the next few weeks.

The abdominal binder should be worn for a total of six weeks after surgery. It should be tight-fitting, but not uncomfortably so.

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Around the house

For maximum comfort at home, please wear loose-fitting clothes. Dr. Beldholm strongly suggests the use of a recliner chair for the first few days. In bed, prop pillows under your thighs and behind your head to allow your body to bend at the waist, thereby relieving some tension from your suture line. After an abdominoplasty it is absolutely normal to feel tight and experience pain and discomfort in the abdomen, rib cage and back. These symptoms will improve with each passing day. Eat a healthy diet including fibre to maintain regular bowel habits.

Compression garments, sometimes also called abdominal binders, are a vital part of the abdominoplasty recovery process. Designed to provide maximum comfort and much-needed support to your surgical areas, compression garments support tummy tuck recovery by applying pressure to swollen areas, resulting in decreased bouncing and jiggling. They also improve blood circulation while speeding up the recovery process. These garments also assist skin to conform to its new contours, while helping the body rid itself of toxic fluids.

You may walk and go to the bathroom on the evening of your abdominoplasty surgery. Certainly by the next morning you should be walking short distances. Dr. Beldholm recommends that you begin a regular regime of light exercise about a week after surgery which will help you heal faster and more completely. Although walking is usually the best exercise to engage in after surgery, other forms of non-aerobic exercise may also be acceptable. A gentle exercise plan can help reduce swelling, prevent blood clots, and strengthen the immune system. Remember to avoid all strenuous exercise for six weeks. During your tummy tuck recovery time, you will need to pay special attention to your body's physical limitations to avoid reopening your wounds and increasing the time needed to fully heal. Even if you feel great, remember not to overdo it. Although it takes most patients several weeks or more to feel completely "back to normal" and to see their final tummy tuck benefits, patients who were in good physical condition at the time of the surgery will have a shorter recovery time.

Return to work

Most tummy tuck surgery patients require two weeks of recovery time before they return to work. If your work requires strong physical activity, it may be wise to plan for three to four weeks of recovery.

Driving

Most tummy tuck surgery patients require two weeks of recovery time before they return to driving.