



# DR. IRFAN WADIWALA

Board Certified General Surgeon  
& Weight loss Surgery

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## Preparing for Abdominoplasty Surgery

### You've scheduled your appointment for surgery now what!?

- Clean your house - or have it cleaned
- Unless you are lucky and have a significant other that can cook, shop for recovery food and treats like pudding, Jell-O, frozen dinners; or cook your own and freeze it.
- Take out the trash, recyclables, etc. so you don't have to worry about it
- Have all of your laundry taken care of
- Make a "Honey Do" list (bills, thermostat settings, errands, whatever). Sometimes our significant others can be quite helpless without us
- Purchase all of your medications and dressings beforehand, in case your pharmacy is in short supply.
- Place all medications either in a weekly pill "case" or in labeled containers, by day and time if need be.
- Have lots of movies, books, magazines or videogames on hand.
- A laptop is an awesome thing to have during recovery - also have computer batteries/AC adaptors on hand
- If no laptop, maybe a Gameboy or a PlayStation/Nintendo set up near you - you will get bored.
- Have someone watch your dog, cat, children, and pet.
- If you can't have your pets cared for, tend to their needs beforehand, i.e. put cans of food on the counter with the can opener so you don't have to reach for it. Change the litter box as well. You don't want to expose yourself to these germs and you will have a hard time bending over or kneeling!
- Have lots of fluffy pillows on hand
- A comfortable recliner is a good thing, if not the bed is perfectly fine, just keep your upper body well elevated.
- Have a bucket or pail at your bedside and on the ride home in case you get sick - essential. Make sure it has a lid, you don't want to stare at it or smell it afterwards.
- A nightstand with all of your medications, ample light, bottled water, a few packages of crackers, remote control (with new batteries!) & the phone (fully charged!)
- Have a nightlight set up so you don't fall during late night bathroom trips . Medications can make you disoriented.
- Extra blankets, anesthesia can give you the "chills" after surgery
- A heating pad, hot water bottle or microwaveable pack is great for a sore back (which you will get for sure!)
- A "go-fer" - a significant other or an older child will suffice
- Have some crackers, Cheez-its or Goldfish to help alleviate nausea - especially on the way home - bring a bottle of water to for the ride home. Sipping cool water helps alleviate nausea as well as gets rid of the taste in your mouth if you do vomit.
- Place anything you may need at hip level so that you have no need to reach or bend down. This means canned and dry goods in the kitchen and toiletries in the bathroom. Bending over is just as bad as trying to stand up straight prematurely!
- Have your trusty robe and slippers (or several pair of thick socks) nearby



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- Have a few comfortable oversized shirts that open from the front on hand, as well as some loose elastic or drawstring sweat pants or pajama bottoms.
- If you have long hair a few "scrunchies" are great to put your hair back with to keep it out of your face, unknotted and out of the way.
- Have a good moisturizer on hand - a must!
- A box of tissues is great to have on hand, especially if you get all emotional from your medications or the anesthesia.
- Make time for yourself before your surgery; pour a bath, light some candles, listen to some music - relax. Try to gather your thoughts and soothe your mind.
- The night before** (and with some surgeons for 3 days before) you may be asked to wash with Dial Antibacterial or Hibiclens soap to help rid your body of its naturally occurring Staph on the skin's surface - you don't want a Staph infection!
- Wash your hair the night before surgery - it may be a long time before you get to do that again.
- Remove any fingernail and toenail polish.
- Talk to your spouse about any concerns that you may have, they may have some insights or questions you haven't thought of - and they may be experiencing pre-op anxiety as well.
- Ask your surgeon if you can take an over the counter sleeping medication. These may help with tense muscles and tense minds. It can be difficult to sleep.
- "Black out" your windows so that when you do get to sleep - regardless of the hours - you can stay asleep.
- If you think television, video games and reading are eventually going to bore you or stress your eyes - have a Discman MP3 player on hand with your favorite relaxing music.
- Have fresh film or a disposable "postoperative photo" camera on hand. Especially if you are considering documenting your procedure with before and afters or day-by-day photos.
- Have your journal and a few fresh, fully inked pens ready if you want to document your post-operative thoughts in writing or type it onto your laptop.
- Just in case the lights go out, have a flash light on your nightstand.
- Place nightlights to light your way to the bathroom should the need arise during the night.
- Getting woken up when you just got to sleep is so annoying. Don't forget to turn down the sound and turn off the ringer. You need your sleep.
- Last but not least, RELAX. If you are super stressed out it can really affect your recovery. Try to remember that you will heal, you will be less sore and that you are going to look great! **Just be patient.**



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## **Tips on Recovery from Tummy Tuck Surgery**

When you wake up after tummy tuck surgery, your abdomen may be very swollen and it may be throbbing. Don't wait for pain to be unbearable before you take your pain medication. Take your pain medication on time because that stops the pain before it gets too bad. You will actually use less pain medication if you take it on time than if you wait for the pain to become severe. And pain interferes with healing. There is absolutely no reason to be tough and suffer through the pain.

As the days go on the swelling and pain will dissipate. You may have bruising, but this will go away as well. Make a mental note of this or you may fall into a depression. Bruising and swelling are normal and only to be expected after most surgeries.

When you leave the hospital or surgical facility, you should receive a list of postoperative instructions and a general advice on the recovery from plastic surgery. This should tell you how often to change the dressings, whether you can shower or take a sponge bath, and what restrictions you have on your movement or activity. The list should also give you things to watch out for, such as an elevated temperature or bleeding from the incision and information on how to contact the surgeon.

The skin on your abdomen may be numb. This is normal. Abdominoplasty involves loosening the skin from its previous attachments and redraping it. That action, along with the incisions, means that some nerves were cut. Sensation will usually come back gradually over the course of several months. Sometimes, the first thing you will feel in areas that were numb is itchiness or tingling. There is the possibility that sensation in the skin will not come back completely.

## **Take your temperature regularly! An elevated temperature could mean an infection.**

Take those antibiotics on time. Take the whole prescription and don't cut it short if you feel well. If you were told to take the pills for a whole week or two weeks or whatever, do it. Not taking antibiotics for the prescribed number of days can cause a drug-resistant infection.

If you are taking birth control pills, remember that some antibiotics can interfere with them, so in the event that you have sex, use another form of protection as well. However, I sincerely believe that you won't even be thinking of sexual relations or any type of major movement for at least a week or longer. Even if you felt up to having sex, don't until you get a go ahead from your surgeon! It could cause complications such as suture popping, wound opening and infection.

Sleep with your head and shoulders elevated for the first week to 14 days or however long your surgeon suggests. Use two or three good fluffy pillows to keep your head up or perhaps a wedge-shaped pillow.



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You will be laying down a lot because you will be sore and will have problems standing upright for a week. Sitting may be more comfortable, but still might be a bit much for you. Sleeping may not be a problem, since some pain medications can make you sleepy. The energy that your body will use in healing can also make you feel sleepy, too. Sleeping is actually good for you while you heal.

Getting up and down from a sitting position or in and out of bed will be difficult and will hurt. One trick I learned to get out of bed was to first roll on my side close to the edge of the bed. Then I would let my legs drop over the side of the bed at the same time I pushed my upper body upright with the arm that was underneath me. This way I spared my abdominal muscles a bit of strain. Remember, everything will continue to get easier as the days pass. Full recovery after tummy tuck could be several weeks.

You will have a follow-up visit with your surgeon about 3 or 4 days after your tummy tuck surgery. He or she will check your drains, examine your incision, and generally check to see how you are doing.

Your sutures may be removed 5 to 10 days after surgery, but may be left in for 2 weeks or more. Parts of your incision may heal faster than other parts, so your surgeon may take some sutures out and leaves others in a little longer. While the incision is still open, do not smoke or use nicotine patches or gums. These interfere with healing. Better yet, quit smoking.

Wear abdominal support garment! Your doctor may advise you to wear a support garment around your abdomen. This may be in the form of a wide binder that goes around your abdomen or a girdle-like garment that pulls on or zips up the side. Either will compress your abdomen a bit and help in healing and controlling the swelling. You may even wake up after the surgery with an abdominal binder already on.

You might want to have two or three of the binders or surgical abdominal support garments on hand while you heal, so that you can wear one while you wash the other. Some need to be line-dried and are slow to dry, so having a second or third on hand is a good thing.

Abdominal support binders come in several widths and sizes. They can be purchased at many pharmacies or surgical supply stores. I preferred the wider binders to the narrower ones, but that was just a personal preference. Getting a binder on straight can take a bit of practice. The first few weeks, I would put the binder on while standing. First I would center it at my back and then pull the two ends around so that the end with the Velcro closure overlapped the other end. Try to get it as smooth as possible since any wrinkles can pinch a bit. You may need to adjust the binder once or twice during the day.

I found it easier to put my panties on so that they overlapped the bottom of the binder, which made going to the bathroom later a bit easier. Some of the girdle-like compression support garments have an open crotch or flap so that you don't have to pull the whole garment down when going to the bathroom.

Empty your surgical drains two or three times a day. When you empty the drain, there is often liquid in the tube leading to the bulb. You can run your fingers down the tube to squeeze this liquid into the bulb each time you empty the drain. The liquid in the drain may be pink, reddish, or brownish and may have a bit of some solid material in it. It will look icky, so expect that. If you suddenly get a lot of very bright red blood or if what comes out smells very foul, call your surgeon.



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You will be asked to keep track of how much fluid collects in each drain each day and your surgeon may give you a chart keep a log of that information. The drains are going to be a pain in the neck, but they are absolutely necessary to a good outcome. When you empty the drain, squeeze it before you close it again so that it has a little bit of suction or negative pressure that helps with drainage. Each of the grenade-like bulbs has a tab that you can put a safety pin through and pin the bulb to your clothing. Some surgeons tell you to pin the bulbs below the incision to help with drainage. If the drains need to be lower than your incisions, you can pin them to the bottom of your binder. I wore really big sweatpants to accommodate the drains while I had them.

You will be told if you should change the dressings over your abdominoplasty incision and how often. If you stayed in the hospital for a day or two, one of the nurses may instruct you on how to bandage your incision. If you go home the same day as your surgery, you may be given a sheet of instructions on how to change the bandages. As the incision heals, you will gradually need less and less bandaging. Usually, the outer ends of the incision heal first and the center last.

Dr. Wadiwala will inform you when you may shower. You will probably be instructed not to take a bath or use a hot tub, since sitting in standing water before your incision heals is pretty much asking for an infection! (avoid swimming until the incision heals, too.) Sometimes he will allow you to shower 2 to 3 days after your tummy tuck surgery, while others only allow sponge baths until a week afterwards. If you are allowed to shower, you may be asked to wear your support garments, or shower under just a light trickle of water, or with your back to the shower spray. Remember, you may feel a bit dizzy or unsteady on your feet due to medications, so be careful in the shower. You might want to have someone assist you or just be in the bathroom with you the first time you shower. You can also buy a shower seat, which is a small stool or chair that fits in the tub.

You will probably be "out of commission" for at least 2 weeks after your tummy tuck surgery. Your doctor will tell you when you can return to work and to regular activities. However, the more extensive your surgery, the longer the time off from work and other activities will be. Recovery time from tummy tuck varies from person to person. You may need up 6 weeks off for proper healing if you had a very extensive abdominoplasty and other surgery. Another factor is what kind of work you do. If you sit at a desk all day you can probably return to your job sooner than if you are a gym teacher or a letter carrier.

You should not resume exercising until your surgeon says you can. Usually this is at least 3 weeks or more after your abdominoplasty surgery, depending on the extent of your surgery. You may also be able to do some exercises or sports before you are allowed to do others. Listen to your body and don't push yourself. Actually, you probably will not think of exercising for at least a few weeks.

### **Walk around after tummy tuck surgery!**

You will be encouraged to do a bit of walking every day in the first week and more as the weeks pass. Do it. Walking around helps prevent blood clot formation and eases swelling.



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Pain medications (among other drugs) can cause constipation and other digestive problems and can back everything up. You may feel bloated and sometimes even have some intestinal cramps.

Drink plenty of water! This is a big help in keeping you regular and in helping with bloating and other distress. I cannot stress this enough. Some surgeons suggest a mild stool softener like Colace or even natural remedies such as eating daikon (also called Chinese radish) or a high-fiber cereal after you are finished with your medications. This helps with getting your digestive tract in working order again and helps flush out residual medications and whatnot from the "pipes."

### **Tummy Tuck Recovery Tips From Abdominoplasty Patients**

1. Buy a six-pack of cotton panties three sizes bigger than you usually get. Nice big old granny panties, not bikinis. A tight elastic band around your sore abdomen is not comfy! If the seams bother you, wear the panties inside out. Wash them first to get out the chemicals and soften them.
2. If you have surgical drains, try wearing two pairs of panties and putting the drain bulbs in between. If the bulbs poke you, put a sanitary napkin or a gauze square dressing between the bulb and the inner panty. If that is uncomfortable, just pin the bulbs to your nightie or top or to the top of your pants.
3. Ask your plastic surgeon if you can put Bacitracin, Neosporin or another antibiotic ointment on the incision. I did. I found it very soothing, and have healed beautifully. However, some surgeons do not want you to touch the incision any more than is absolutely necessary. Follow your surgeon's instructions.
4. If you have extra pillows, especially down ones, put some under your bottom sheet to make a nice soft nest to sleep on. You'll probably be sleeping on your back at first. It can help a lot if you put one or two pillows under your knees. That can help prevent some stretching on your new abdomen.
5. Take your pain medications! That is what they're for. And don't forget that it gets better every day!

### **Tummy Tuck Scars**

Abdominoplasty is not scar-free surgery. Remember that your abdominoplasty scars will get worse before they get better. Your incision will heal, but scars go through a series of changes before they are completely healed and that can take months. Scars will look their worst at about 3 months after your abdominoplasty surgery. They tend to get very red and thick and raised. Sometimes, if you are cold, they turn a horrible gray-purple. It may take up to a year for your tummy tuck scars to flatten and fade. Most doctors take great care in placing the incisions well below the bikini lines so that they remain hidden, even when you're at the beach! Remember to protect your fresh tummy tuck scars from the sun exposure.

Ask your surgeon about silicone sheeting or other scar minimizing products. These sheets have been shown to help prevent the formation of keloids on your scars and to help flatten old scars, too. Keloids are overgrowths of scar tissue that can form in some wounds. Some people, especially people with medium to dark skin) are prone to developing keloids.

Several of the people on our message board have used silicone sheeting and swear by it. Silicone sheeting is to be used only after your wounds have closed. However, some surgeons instruct their patients to use Steri-Strips rather than silicone sheeting. These are basically medical paper tape and can help flatten and fade scars in the days right after surgery. Steri-Strips can be used on top of suture material and on incisions that are still open.



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## **Depression After Tummy Tuck Surgery**

Many patients, including me, experience periods of sadness or anxiety as they recover from cosmetic surgery. We begin to second guess ourselves and wonder if we ever should have had the surgery in the first place. We begin to think we are "ugly" and that the bruising and swelling will never go away. If you are feeling like that, you are not alone. In fact, you're quite normal!

Some people go beyond feeling blue after cosmetic surgery to being seriously depressed. Depression is a serious condition that should be treated seriously. We have a whole section on Postoperative Depression, so check it out.

Remember that if depression after abdominoplasty does happen to you, it is normal. You can even write down what to expect before your tummy tuck surgery, so you can note it afterwards when you are feeling blue. This can help you keep things in perspective and prepare your mind. It is also remind you that you knew this was going to happen.

Keep reminding yourself that you are not crazy, that you're just going through a low. Your depression should subside. If it does not, speak with Dr. Wadiwala about it. You might want a referral for a therapist.

You might also want to check out the Tummy Tuck Forum, I find it extraordinarily helpful to talk to real abdominoplasty patients about these sad feelings. You can trade stories and seek support from people who have been there and done it and who can help you perhaps better than a therapist. The choice is yours, so do what you think will help best. Heck! Try both!!