



Low Plastic Surgery (LPS)

Dr. Lowe's Facts about Arm Lifts (Brachioplasty)

How do I get started?

It is important prior to surgery for patients to spend some time educating themselves about the pros and cons of arm tucks (brachioplasty). Although patients who undergo arm tucks are typically happy, this elective operation is not for everybody. The big risks of surgery are pain, infection, bleeding, delayed healing, and scarring. Read the educational materials provided and on our website including consent forms prior to surgery. Make sure that your surgeon is Board Certified by the American Board of Plastic Surgery, a member of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS) and American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (ASAPS). Please check out websites and links at: www.drjlowe.com

Do I need an arm tuck?

Patients who have had weight changes, child birth, skin and soft tissue redundancy, or over 40 years of age may be candidates for arm tuck. Patients considering arm tucks need to decide if the risks are worth it or not? Some patients look better with a small bit of skin redundancy than with an arm scar. In most cases, the need for arm tuck is obvious, but in other cases it may not be clear. Patients are typically concerned about substantial skin and soft tissue excess and winging of the upper arm. Patients with stable weight and large amounts of skin redundancy are the best candidates. Patients with significant skin in the lateral breast, axilla, and upper arm seen after major weight loss may require an extended arm tuck or mid body lift. Liposuction is usually all that is required in patients with tight skin and isolated fat deposits. Dr. Lowe always combines liposuction during arm tucks to ensure the best results. A frank discussion with a board certified plastic surgeon will help patients make the right decision.

Are arm tucks covered by health insurance?

Arm tucks by definition are cosmetic surgery procedures. The procedure is not covered by most medical insurance plans. Some patients have large upper arm winging resulting in physical limitation and chronic rash. These patients may be candidates for arm tuck to address this medical problem. It is important to remember that all arm tucks remove the skin and tissue in proximity to vital nerves and blood vessels. Patient can expect the upper arm skin and tissue to be improved and reduced following surgery at the expense of a significant scar and numbness. Most patients undergoing arm tucks need different amounts of skin or tissue removed from each arm. Standard arm tucks or mid trunk lifts are simply not covered by insurance currently. Patients are encouraged to look at photos of arm tucks patients online or in our office before scheduling surgery. Dr. Lowe will discuss these issues during the consultation and consent process.

What is the difference between a mini and standard arm tuck?

There are a number of different ways to perform arm tucks. Most surgeons define a mini arm tucks as limited procedures involving skin removal confined to the armpit. In our practice arm tucks are priced based on time and complexity. Patients requiring less work and time in the operating room are rewarded by a smaller fee. Some arm tucks are more extensive requiring more undermining, skin removal, soft tissue reconstruction, and liposuction. Patients with a lot of skin redundancy below the elbow may be candidates for extended arm tucks. The natural break in the skin usually determines scar location. The patient's age and health will also help to determine the best operation. Most patients are best suited for the standard in arm incision, dissection, tightening, and liposuction. The axillary incisions are often associated with delayed healing due to the moisture and activity in the area.

What is the best technique for an arm tuck?

Patients should take some time to decide what areas of the upper arm and axilla are of concern. Patients may want a smooth flat upper arm and others only a small improvement. The best

approach can usually be determined with a consultation with a board certified Plastic Surgeon. In most cases patients choose to have as much skin and fat removed as possible to ensure a lasting result. The longer the surgical incision the more skin and redundancy may be removed. Some patients prefer limited incisions that they can cancel in the armpit or lateral breast. The best option depends on the patient's anatomy, preference, and willingness to compromise. Many patients combine arm tucks with other procedures such as breast reduction, breast lift, or trunk liposuctions. Scars length should always be limited at all cost even when results are compromised. Patients should avoid extending incisions across the elbow as patient satisfaction is poor. A frank discussion with your plastics surgeon will help most patients chose the best option.

Do I need an incision on my upper arm?

Standard arm tucks usually require an inner arm and armpit incision. Current trends and changes in surgical techniques have resulted in changes in the way surgeons deal with the upper arm. Less is always better. Plastic surgeons have increasingly limited surgical incisions within the armpit. In many patients the improvement with a more limited approach is subtle but patients are not forced to conceal an unsightly arm scar. Most patients have arm tucks in order to wear short sleeve shirts, but after surgery patients avoid short sleeves due to the scars instead of excess skin and fat. Patients with major weight loss, large fat deposits, or over 40 years usually require at least small incision in the upper arm. In most cases, the need for inner arm incisions is obvious, but in other cases it may not be clear. Patients should discuss these issues with the plastic surgeon to help them make the right decision.

Do arm tucks last forever?

No body contouring procedure or liposuction lasts forever. Patients are encouraged to lose weight before surgery and avoid weight gain after surgery. Losing weight before surgery allows for more skin removal and tightening of supporting structures. Patients who lose a substantial amount of weight after arm tucks may require revisions in the future. It is important for patients to stabilize their weight prior to considering arm tucks. The longevity of arm tucks is closely related to the quality and strength of the skin in the area.

How long is the incision and how bad is the scar?

One of the biggest concerns for patients considering arm tuck is the length and location of the surgical scars. Elective arm tucks are marked before surgery so the patient understands scar length and location. Patient scars look the worse at 2 months and then improve at 8-12 months. Dr. Lowe recommends scar treatments once the incision is fully healed. Prominent scars and delayed healing may require revision or laser treatment. The only thing for sure about arm tucks, is that the scars are highly unpredictable. The results are more dependent on patient genetics than on surgeon skill.

Does future revision cost a lot?

The cost for arm tuck revision is limited for patients who experience complications within the first several months when returning to the original surgeon. However, revision arm tucks are usually cheaper than a primary surgery. Revision arm tucks may be required after skin stretch, weight fluctuation, and full scar maturation. In most cases, small scar revisions or laser treatments can be performed in the surgeon's office. In some cases, revision surgery is necessary to address more complex issues. Patients should talk to their plastic surgeon about the risks and potential complications of elective arm tucks prior to surgery.

Where and when should I have surgery?

One of the most important decisions for patients considering arm tucks is where and when. Arm tucks can be performed at a hospital with overnight stay or surgical facility with home care. The benefit of a hospital setting is the overnight pain management and care. Patients in a surgical facility will be given a period of recovery and then go home the same day. There is a saying "you can hurt at the hospital or hurt at home." In general, standard arm tucks are better in outpatient

setting and bigger arm tucks are better in inpatient setting. Most patients require assistance at home for several days, feel better at one month, and recovery fully by three months. Each patient's pain control and recovery is different and cannot always be determined in advance. Although Dr. Lowe will make recommendations, each patient should make their own decision of when and where they should have surgery.

What are the restrictions after surgery?

It is important for patients to understand the recovery associated with arm tucks. Patients are asked to limit activity for 4-6 weeks after surgery. Patients need to wear support garments or arm compression for 2 weeks day and night and for two weeks at night thereafter. Some patients require surgical drains to decrease fluid collection and control swelling. Most drains stay in place only overnight, but bigger surgery may require drains for several weeks. Sutures usually stay for 2-3 weeks and staples are sometimes required to provide additional support. Patients report swelling, numbness, significant scarring, and minor pain for up to 8 months after arm tucks.

What about patient safety?

There are a variety of safety concerns for arm tuck surgery. Most concerns relate to post-operative scarring and have already been reviewed. However, in most cases the safety of arm tucks with liposuction is most dependent on the surgeon and surgical facility. Arm tucks are an elective operation reserved in most cases for patients in good health in an outpatient setting. Dr. Lowe is a real plastic surgeon, who performs real surgery, in a real surgical center. As a member of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS) he is required to follow guidelines designed to ensure the best patient safety and outcomes. Dr. Lowe proudly performs cosmetic surgery only in accredited hospitals and surgical facilities. Most of his cosmetic patients undergo surgery at his certified in-office operating suite, Associates Surgery Center of Oklahoma (ASCO). ASCO is fully certified by the American Association for the Accreditation of Ambulatory Surgery Facilities (AAAASF). For further information about safety and credentials go to: www.AAAASF.org or www.drjlowe.com

Should I wait and think about my options?

Arm tuck or brachioplasty is an important lifelong decision. The surgical procedure carries significant risks and benefits. Patients require a period of recovery and long term scar treatment. Patients should choose a board certified plastic surgeon that they trust, takes time, reviews risks, and puts safety first. One of the most important aspects of the surgery is patient care and follow-up. Although surgeons cannot pay all the cost of revision it is usually best to stick with the surgeon you choose to ensure the best outcome at the best price. When possible, patients should talk about their plans with physicians, family members, and significant others. Patients should have realistic expectations regarding the surgery, recovery, and results. An arm tuck with liposuction can be the right operation for the right person!

What are Dr. Lowe's take home points?

1. Take your time & ask questions (never rush)
2. Review your plastic surgeon's results (pre and post-op photos)
3. Understand risks (delayed healing or numbness)
4. The scars can be hard to hide and really prominent
5. Limit the incision as much as possible
6. If the surgeon does not recommend surgery –don't do it!
7. Drains and long term compression are often required
8. Combine with breast enhancement procedures when indicated
9. Surgeon and facility certification and safety matters
10. Pick and stick with your surgeon when possible