

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 tummy tucks (abdominoplasty). Although patients who undergo tummy tucks are typically very 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 your 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 a tummy tuck?

Patients who have had weight changes, child birth, skin and soft tissue redundancy, or over 40 years of age may be candidates for tummy tuck. Patients considering tummy 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 a tummy tuck scar. In most cases, the need for tummy tuck is obvious, but in other cases it may not be clear. Patients are typically concerned about constant bulging, lower abdominal fullness, and skin overlap at the waist. Patients not planning future pregnancy with stable weight are the best candidates. Patients with significant skin around the waist or lateral thigh often seen after major weight loss may require an extended tummy tuck or body lift. Liposuction is sometimes all is required in patients with tight skin and only isolated fat deposits. Dr. Lowe always combines liposuction during tummy tucks to ensure the best results. A frank discussion with a board certified plastic surgeon will help patients make the right decision.

Are tummy tucks covered by health insurance?

Tummy tucks by definition are cosmetic surgery procedures. The procedure is not covered by medical insurance plans. Some patients have large abdominal pannus or abdominal roll resulting in physical limitation and chronic rash. These patients may be candidates for pannus removal to address this medical problem. A pannus removal through insurance can sometimes be combined with a formal tummy tuck if approved. It is important to remember that all tummy tucks remove the pannus, but not all pannus removals are tummy tucks. Both patient groups can expect the lower abdominal fold to be improved and reduced following surgery. Many patients undergoing tummy tuck will need some skin or tissue removed from the sides. Body lifts or extended tummy tucks long procedures that are not covered by insurance currently. Patients are encouraged to look at photos of tummy tuck or other body contouring patients online or in our office before scheduling surgery. Dr. Lowe will discuss these important issues during the course of the consultation and consent process.

What is the difference between a mini-tummy and standard tummy tuck?

There are a number of different types of tummy tucks. Most surgeons define a mini-tummy tuck as a limited procedure involving skin removal and tightening below the belly button. In our practice body contouring procedures are priced based on time and complexity. Patients requiring less work and time in the operating room are rewarded by a smaller fee. Some tummy tucks are more extensive requiring more undermining, skin removal, muscle reconstruction, and liposuction. Patients that have a lot of flank and buttock redundancy are candidates for extended tummy tucks. The natural break in the skin and scar location is usually best determined in consultation with a board certified plastic surgeon. The patient's age and health will also determine the best operation. Most patients considering tummy tucks are best suited for the standard incision, dissection, midline tightening, liposuction, and belly button repositioning.

What is the best technique for a tummy tuck?

Patients should take some time to deciding what areas of the abdomen and flank are of concern. Patients may want a smooth flat abdomen 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 it is best for patients 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 panty line or under a bathing suit. The best option depends on the patient's anatomy, preference, and willingness to compromise. Many patients combine tummy tucks with other procedures such as breast augmentation, breast lift, or liposuctions of the thighs. A frank discussion with your plastics surgeon will help most patients chose the best option.

Do I need my belly button moved?

Standard tummy tucks usually require the release and re-inset of the belly button. Current trends and changes in surgical techniques have resulted in changes in the way surgeons deal with the belly button. Plastic surgeons have increasingly placed surgical incisions lower along the pelvic rim as hip-huggers and low raise pants become more popular. In many patients the bell-button can be left in place particularly those undergoing mini-tummy tucks do. Patients who have had major weight changes, multiple children, large fat deposits, or over 40 years of age usually require a small incision around the belly button. In most cases, the need for belly button surgery (umbilicoplasty) is obvious, but in other cases it may not be clear. Patients should have a frank discussion with the board certified plastic surgeon to help them make the right decision.

Does a tummy tuck last forever?

No tummy tuck or liposuction lasts forever. Patients are encouraged to lose weight before surgery and avoid weight gain after surgery. Losing weight before surgery allows for the removal of more skin and aggressive tightening of abdominal muscles. Patients who lose a substantial amount of weight after tummy tuck may require revision in the future. Patients who are planning to get pregnant should wait at least 6 months after last childbirth. It is very important for patients to have a tummy tuck when their weight is stable and no babies are planned.

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

One of the biggest concerns for patients considering tummy tuck is choosing the length and location of the surgical scars. Elective tummy tucks will be marked before surgery to ensure the patient understands scar position and location. Patient scars typically look the worse at 2 months and then improve at 8-12 months. Dr. Lowe will review scar treatments recommendations once the surgical incision is fully healed. Patients should be aware of the surgical incision. Prominent scars or delayed wound healing may need to be revised or treated with a laser.

Does future revision cost a lot?

The cost for tummy tuck revision is limited for patients who experience complications within the first several months when returning to the original surgeon. However, a revision tummy tucks is usually cheaper than a primary surgery. Revision tummy tucks may be the best option after skin stretch, weight fluctuation, or aging revision. 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 board certified plastic surgeon about the risks and potential complications of elective tummy tucks prior to surgery.

Where and when should I have surgery?

One of the most important decisions for patients considering tummy tucks is where and when. Tummy 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, smaller tummy tucks are better

in outpatient setting and bigger tummy tucks are better in inpatient setting. Most patients require significant 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 also important to be aware of the recovery associated with tummy tucks. Patients undergoing tummy tucks are asked to limit activity for 4-6 weeks. Patients will need to wear a support garment or abdominal binder for 2 weeks day and night and for two weeks at night thereafter. All patients require small surgical drains to help decrease fluid collection and control swelling. Most drains stay in place for at least 7-10 days, but bigger surgery may require drains for several months. Sutures usually stay in place for 2-3 weeks and staples are sometimes required to provide additional support. Some patients who are unable to urinate after surgery will require a temporary placement of a bladder or Foley catheter. Patients report swelling, numbness, significant scarring, and minor pain for up to 6 months after tummy tucks.

What about patient safety?

There are a variety of safety concerns related to tummy tucks. Many of the concerns are related to post-operative wound healing and have already been reviewed. However, in most cases the safety of tummy tucks with liposuction is most dependent on your surgeon and the surgical facility. Tummy tuck is 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?

Tummy tucks are an important lifelong decision. The surgical procedure carries significant risks and benefits. Patients require a period of recovery and long term scar treatment. Patient should choose a board certified plastic surgeon that they feel comfortable, takes time, reviews risks, puts safety first, and trust. 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, long term care, and results. A tummy tuck with liposuction is often the right thing for the right person

What are Dr. Lowe's take home points?

1. Review your plastic surgeon's results (look at pre and post-op photos)
2. Take your time & ask questions (tummy tucks are tough)
3. Full recovery is usually 6-8 weeks
4. Understand risks (delayed healing or scarring)
5. Place the incision as low as possible to avoid a visible scar
6. Remove as much tissue as possible (limited scar, limited results)
7. Decide where to have the surgery (surgical center or hospital – transfer is expensive)
8. Extended tummy tuck must have surgery at a hospital with overnight stay
9. Surgeon and facility certification and safety matters
10. Pick and stick with your surgeon when possible