

## **TUMMY TUCK (ABDOMINOPLASTY) RECOVERY**

*“I did have reconstructive plastic surgery and a tummy tuck. And from hip to hip, there's a very big scar. It looks better than it did... So I say, if you don't like that skin, have it removed. This is my advice: if you're gonna do it - just go for it.” —Carnie Wilson*

Your body, goals, and treatment choices are unique and important to your confidence. So, you are considering or have scheduled with SSK to undergo a tummy tuck either alone, with liposuction, or to accompany one or more other procedures. A mini-tummy tuck involves only the lower abdomen; a full tummy tuck could span the area from beneath the lower ribcage to the pubic bone. Maybe you want a **Mommy Makeover** (a tummy tuck, a breast augmentation, and another procedure to achieve overall proportion). We are honored to serve your cosmetic surgery needs with the finest attention, technique, and after-care. Please refer to the following information.

## **YOUR TAILORED PROCEDURE AND RECOVERY**

### **Anesthesia:**

Your surgery will be under general anesthesia (but also with a local anesthetic to maximize pain control). During the procedure, we do our utmost to minimize bruising and swelling with gentle tissue handling, meticulous hemostasis, good blood pressure control, and a combination of many other proven strategies so that you can be presentable and back to your normal activities ASAP.

### **After Surgery, in the Recovery Unit:**

When you are awake, our staff will again review with you the post-operative care instructions that we discussed earlier. We use simple, easy-care dressings and comfortable support/compression garments that will keep your wounds positioned symmetrically during the early stages of healing while also controlling swelling and preventing accumulation of fluid. You will also find that I have inserted a small pain pump catheter that will release a local anesthetic to the surgical site when you need it in a controlled fashion over several days to keep you comfortable. When necessary, I also insert drains to remove excessive fluid from the surgical sites. Instructions will include how to bandage your incisions, which clothing items you can/cannot wear and the duration of restrictions, other details about your postsurgical care and normal symptoms, and potential signs of complications. When you are well enough for your driver to take you home, whether from outpatient (for most tummy tucks) or inpatient care, we intend you to have little to worry about so that you can start to enjoy the optimized results to the chosen parts of your body while someone helps you at home. You must have someone stay with you, especially overnight, because the anesthetic can affect you for the next 24 hours and you will not be able to care for yourself.

*Outpatient:* Either I or a member of our staff will call later to check on you.

*Inpatient:* Depending on co-morbidities, distance from the hospital, the extent of the procedure, and whether you are experiencing any unusual reactions, you may be admitted for a 23-hour hospital stay in a room after surgery. I will visit you the next day.

### **Help/Support at Home:**

**It is critical to keep your arrangement of having someone to stay with you in order to help with your care and with your family's needs for at least a few days and maybe up to a week, depending on the extent of your surgery and your situation at home.** If the plan you scheduled falls through, call us right away; we can arrange for a private-duty nurse or a trained companion to care for you at your expense. Having help is crucial to your safety and your recovery! Either I or a member of our staff will call later to check on you.

### **Medications & Bandages:**

Take your oral pain medications and antibiotics on time; take all of the antibiotics, even if you think you feel better. I probably will have the pain pump removed prior to your first follow-up visit/exam with me during the first week. During Week 2, you will start to taper the dose of your prescription pain medications for various reasons, including to avoid constipation, which would increase your discomfort/pain. If you experience extreme or long-lasting pain, allergic reactions, or other unusual symptoms, call us without undue delay. When you change your bandages, following the instructions you were given, carefully check your incision for any abnormal occurrences.

**Smoking:** Please do NOT smoke or use nicotine patches/gums for MINIMUM 4 weeks prior AND 4 weeks after surgery. Smoking interferes with healing by preventing bloodflow to the skin and downgrades your health in general.

### **Sleep/Rest:**

The head of your bed should be elevated to prop up your torso through Week 2. You should sleep on your back or your side. Your knees should be slightly bent and supported by pillows or a small wedge pillow through Week 2; this relaxed position will help to keep your abdominal muscles and skin relaxed to lessen pressure on your wound. Your head and back should remain inclined (25-45 degrees) on a wedge pillow, in a recliner chair, or on a pile of pillows for at least the first few postop days to reduce swelling and to improve comfort. If your pillows tend to slip, arrange them under your bottom sheet.

### **Compression Garment/Abdominal Binder:**

This is worn to limit swelling and prevent fluid from accumulating. In many cases it's best to have at least 1 more available, clean, and ready to put on in case the first one gets wet or stained. You should not have any problems with going to the bathroom while wearing this. You must wear one of these garments 24/7 for the first 2 weeks (except for showering)! Depending on your condition and the extent of your surgery, I may have you decrease the frequency of compression over the next 1-3 months.

### **Showering vs. Bathing:**

*First Day:* NO shower/bath. You may do a sponge bath ("bird bath") to cleanse your face, arms, and legs, which should not get your compression garment wet.

*Day 2:* You may shower. I prefer that you not submerge their incisions in water (such as in a bathtub, pool, hot tub, or ocean) for 3-4 weeks while your wounds are healing.). For your safety, I also recommend that you sit on a shower chair and/or have someone in the bathroom to help you, especially because you may be/become weak, unsteady, or dizzy. Please also have a supportive person help you with removal of your compression garment, pat dry, and put the new compression garment back on right away for wearing 24/7. If you have drains, make sure they

are not hanging straight to the floor as they will get ripped out and that is not fun nor good for your healing; always make sure your drains are secured and have some slack. When you are showering, you may pin your drains to an old necklace or Mardi Gras beads to keep your hands free.

### **Clothing:**

Besides wearing the special support garments we provided, you should continue to dress as you did on your surgery day: soft, loose, comfortable clothing that goes on and comes off easily and is not tight: tops and sweaters that open in the front for if you had breast surgery with your tummy tuck, probably roomy elastic-waist pants, and slip-on shoes so that you won't have to bend over or to excessively activate your arms and chest muscles. If you have surgical drains, you can pin them to your clothing where you won't press on them.

### **Beverages & Foods:**

Please stay hydrated, mostly with water, before surgery and after surgery throughout your recovery, especially during the first 3 days. Sufficient hydration is necessary for various reasons and benefits, including to avoid painful constipation. In addition to water, we recommend 100% juices and some Gatorade (G2 has less sugar); we discourage sodas and other drinks that contain a lot of sugar, for good general health and to inhibit harmful inflammation. I discourage the intake of alcoholic beverages for the first 1-2 weeks, especially to avoid negative interactions with your medications; I then recommend that they be limited to no more than 2-3 weekly throughout the remainder of your recovery. You should have prepared for your post-surgical recovery by buying lots of bottled water if you need it, along with low-sodium/caffeine-free/high-protein beverages and foods, and fresh fruits and veggies.

### **Activities:**

*Days 1-5:* From the day of surgery onward, you should rest nearly all the time. You will not feel like doing anything more than the briefest necessary walking ***with support*** to and from the bathroom and the kitchen for a few lightweight items; that's what you need because too much movement will cause fluid to accumulate at and damage to your surgical sites. This is a good time to catch up on reading (newspapers, magazines, books) and to watch movies and TV shows. DO NOT try to take care of someone else; this is your time for someone to take care of you, and you may be surprised to learn how much you need help. You should walk, bent over a little, around the room briefly 3-5 times daily. You will not be able to stand up straight; don't push it.

*Week 3:* I repeat, listen to your body to gauge the level of activity that your healing level can tolerate. You may be able to stand up straight. If your body naturally and easily shifts into that position, that's okay, but don't try to stretch further, and do NOT attempt to force it. Wear your compression garment AT LEAST half of the time now; if you feel comfortable/safe to sleep without it at night, doing so may be okay. You may do a little more moving around/walking and a few simple chores as tolerated around the house and even in your yard so long as they will not involve pressure (leaning, pushing, pulling, etc.) on your incisions; remember that you should not lift over 5-10 pounds.

*Week 4:* You may still feel safer to wear your compression garment at least half of the time. You may work up from light walking to a moderate level so long as your abdominal muscles are not being tugged. You may stretch *gently* without disturbing your abdomen. You may still have

a little swelling and numbness here and there, and if you feel a healing ridge along your wound it's okay, something that will go away in a few weeks.

Week 5: You will have seen me for your 1 month post-op appointment by this time. You may begin to resume your normal life (except no lifting over 20lbs for another 4 weeks) and to notice your new body contours. After I examine you and give the okay, you may drive for short trips. Weight lifting restrictions are removed at 6-8 weeks from the operation.

**Strenuous Activities: Reaching, Lifting, Pushing, Pulling, Exercising, Sports:** I must restrict you for up to 8 weeks to avoid strenuous activities that activate your abdomen, including running, sudden movements, and heavy lifting (10lbs for first 4 weeks and 20lbs for weeks 4-8) in order to keep your repairs intact. I suggest that you store all the supplies you will need, especially during the first week, where you can easily reach them (at counter level when you are standing and at coffee-table/side-table level when you are resting). If possible, have a speakerphone closeby and remote controls for the TV and other electronics. Do NOT try to bend over or to reach far across, high, or low. **Do not lift, push, or pull anything over 5-10 pounds.** After 6-8 weeks, you may ease back into most of your typical daily activities.

**Driving:** Do NOT drive until after your 1-month exam with me, only with my permission and only for short trips, based on your progress. You must be off narcotic pain medication to be allowed to drive.

**Laundry, Cleaning:** Do NOT do laundry or cleaning for the first 3-4 weeks and, even then, only in moderation.

**Return to Job:** You may be able to return to nonstrenuous work in 2-3 weeks based on your recovery progress and your comfort level.

**Follow-Up:** (See “Medications & Bandages,” “Showering vs. Bathing,” “Activities.”)

I will examine you within a week and at 4 weeks post-op in my Newport Beach Plastic Surgery office. We will continue to monitor your progress, symptoms, sutures as they dissolve over time, and associated overall health at regular intervals to make sure your healing is going as planned. Please refrain from sexual activity for 2 weeks or until I can gauge your recovery and give you the go-ahead. Be gentle with your self-care for the next several weeks and months as you recover and your new shape becomes more apparent.

#### **GENERAL ADDITIONAL RECOVERY INFORMATION:**

**Pain, Soreness, Numbness, Stiffness:** Please see “Medications & Bandages.” Numbness or tingling around your incisions should decrease but may not resolve, depending on your pre-surgical level of sensitivity and which procedure we just did. Deep pressure sensation recovers more easily than fine-point discrimination. Minor site stiffness can be normal for a few days.

**Swelling, Bruising, Redness, Seepage:**

**COMPRESSION GARMENT!** Through meticulous technique, gentle tissue handling, and your wearing of a compression garment 24/7 for the first few weeks, our goal has been to create minimal, if any, bruising, swelling, and discomfort. Certain other factors determine how much

bruising takes place, such as the complexity or amount of surgery, the surgical sites (areas with thinner skin bruise more easily than thick areas), and your genetics (if you bruise more easily than your friends, you might bruise more than they do with surgery). Inflammation and swelling is normal in healing and varies in duration, depending on your procedure(s). On average, for most procedures that we perform, patients are presentable from a few days to about two weeks. A little redness around your incision can be normal during the first week. Results are aided by the consistent use of a high-level sunblock (at least 30 SPF).

### **Sutures/Incisions, Scarring:**

Most of your sutures are dissolvable and both hidden and working on the inside, helping to support your closure over 2-6 months; to seal the skin edges we use either skin glue or ster-strips (fine skin tape applied over incisions), which usually fall off on their own. Most plastic surgery closures are designed to be tension free and to prevent unsightly scars that widen by performing layered closures. On outside layers, these are normally placed into natural skin folds and creases, or in other locations where they are best concealed. Where incisions are visible, they will look worse before they look better as they change over the months to reach complete healing. Avoid scratching your incisions, especially if they itch. The deeper-layer sutures that I use do not need to be taken out because they are absorbable and support your wound for 2-6 months, during the most-critical phases of wound remodeling. External sutures are usually removed by 10-14 days on the body. Don't be unduly concerned about scarring--it usually fades over time; meanwhile, you can ask us about scar control therapy using medical grade silicone products if you have any concerns.

### **When to Call Us:**

Call us without undue delay if you see a fiery redness, seepage/pus, or pulled stitches, and if you have allergic reactions or other unusual symptoms, especially with intense and long-lasting pain. Also, at some point during recovery from your tummy tuck in Orange County you may feel depressed, "blue." A little sadness or anxiety about your situation is normal; reminding yourself that the expected results will make it all worthwhile. But if it's long lasting and you can't get a handle on it, please tell me as your **Orange County Plastic Surgeon** and together we'll seek professional therapeutic and support assistance for you.

### **Recovery Time: Full Recovery in 6-8 Weeks**

Patience is key with recovery. Patients have different procedures, some have more and more-complex procedures than others, and all have different healing processes; so, recovery times will vary. You should feel a little better each day. According to our pre-surgical discussion, you should have set aside 2-3 weeks for the initial and most-complex phase of your recovery and time off work. Recovery from a tummy tuck is a balancing act between keeping you quiet for healing and having you move a little now and then to keep blood and oxygen circulating properly throughout your body. You will not be able to stand up straight or walk upright for at least a week; trying to do so would assuredly pull on and damage your **Orange County tummy tuck**. Similarly, lifting over 5-10 pounds and sudden or strenuous movements would harm your surgical site. Meanwhile, you should walk very briefly with support only to and from the bathroom and to the kitchen for a small, lightweight item. When you feel improved enough to walk a little inside the house, you will be bent over and limited, but doing a little will help to keep your circulation going properly to prevent blood clots. We will maximize your post-op

comfort by combining oral pain medications and muscle relaxers; they have different functions and may work synergistically when combined. You shouldn't expect that you will bounce back even after a couple of weeks following a procedure such as this, especially if you had a tummy tuck as a part of a **Mommy Makeover** or other procedures at the same time.

I would be honored to have earned your trust and your approval in compassionate, skilled care--before, during, and after the best tummy tuck procedure Orange County has to offer. As your Orange County Plastic Surgeon, my goals are always to place your safety, satisfaction, and care as my top priority to help in rendering a better quality of life for you. If you have had a tummy tuck with other procedures, you are recharging your overall appearance to look and feel trimmer, toned, and sexy. The sky's the limit on your confidence!

**After You Recover:**

We encourage a healthful diet and an exercise program to maintain your investment in yourself and the attractive results you've just achieved. To maximize your safety and your attractive, healthy outcome, please remember to follow through on prescribed periodic evaluations with me. Also, call and come in if you notice unexpected changes or pain. Remember: You're a member of our extended family of patients and welcome with us after your procedure whether just to say hi or to have questions answered.