

# Tummy Tuck

## & Body Contouring

### Recovery Guide

**C**ongratulations on taking the exciting step to enhance your look through tummy tuck surgery! Our goal with this guide is to provide you with helpful information at your fingertips to make your recovery as smooth and speedy as possible.

In the initial weeks after your surgery, you will be sore and more swollen than usual as your body heals. But as swelling diminishes, your abdomen's new contours will become fully visible—most patients can see a dramatic difference within one month after surgery—and you will enjoy the satisfaction of having a beautifully-contoured, smooth, flat abdomen and the added confidence that goes with it!

The amount of time it takes to recover from tummy tuck surgery varies depending upon the extent of abdominal repair and a patient's physical condition:

- 10-14 days for a tummy tuck that includes repair of the muscle wall
- 7-10 days for a tummy tuck with no muscle wall repair

#### IMPORTANT POINTS TO REMEMBER

- To prevent lower extremity blood clots, it is very important that you take slow 10-minute walks every two hours, except while you sleep, starting on the day of your surgery. Likewise, flexing and extending your feet at the ankles while resting also promotes improved circulation in the calves.
- Beginning at two weeks following surgery, you may begin taking brisk walks for half a mile. Over a two to four week period, walking can be gradually increased from a half-mile, to one mile, to two miles. During this time, it is important that you increase your physical activity gradually, and that you avoid any stress to the abdomen to prevent bleeding and damage to the internal sutures during the healing period.
- Be sure to get adequate rest. You will find it most comfortable to rest with plenty of pillows to prop yourself up in a reclining position; a reclining chair is also a good option.
- Many patients find they have a lighter appetite for the first week or two following surgery. Light snacks such as yogurt, fruit, and crackers are often more appealing and easier to digest during this time.

#### DR. PATRONELLA'S OPTIMAL RECOVERY GUIDE FOR TUMMY TUCK SURGERY

Prior to your surgery, Dr. Patronella and his staff will provide you with detailed information to help you prepare for your tummy tuck surgery and recovery. We will review a packet of information with you which covers topics such as preparations to follow before surgery, medications and herbs to avoid, and instructions for the postoperative period.

As an additional helpful resource, Dr. Patronella has created this Optimal Recovery Guide that will lead you step-by-step through the recovery process and provide you with guidelines to follow regarding exercise, activities, diet, and incision care.

#### PREPARATION FOR TUMMY TUCK SURGERY

These recommendations have a specific purpose such as reducing the risk of bleeding (herbal supplements, aspirin, Advil, etc.), blood clots (estrogen hormones, smoking), and wound healing complications (smoking). Begin 2-4 weeks before surgery.

**1.** Continue (or begin) conditioning exercise such as aerobic exercise, yoga, Pilates, swimming, or weight training. Strengthening your body through aerobic exercise will enable you to recover from surgery more quickly.

**2.** Begin a high protein diet that includes foods such as lean chicken, fish, eggs, beans, and protein shakes. Protein enables your body to effectively heal wounds.

**3.** NO SMOKING for 1 month before surgery and 1 month after surgery. There should be NO SMOKING by anyone in any closed environment during this period. Smoking compromises the body's ability to heal and increases the likelihood of complications occurring.

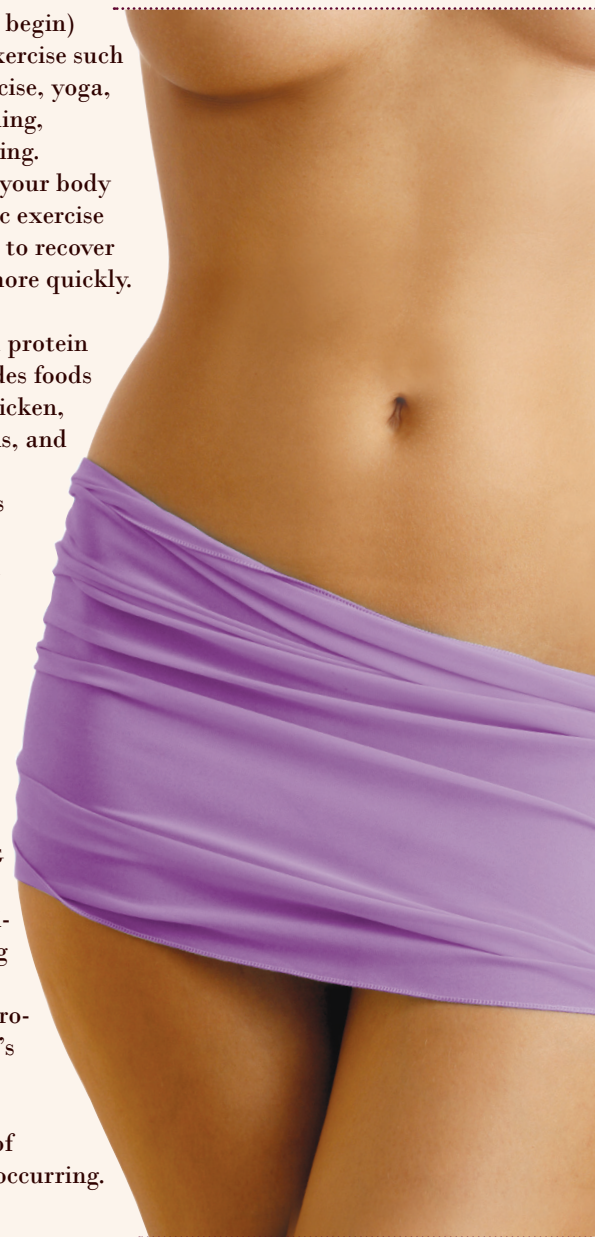
**4.** Stop birth control pills or hormone replacement therapy, including topical or vaginal estrogen creams, for 1 month before and 1 month after surgery.

**5.** Avoid aspirin and other over-the-counter anti-inflammatory medications such as Advil or Aleve (for a full list contact my office) for 2 weeks before and 2 weeks after surgery.

**6.** Avoid over-the-counter herbal supplements for 2 weeks before and 2 weeks after surgery.

**7.** Do not shave the pubic area for 1 week before surgery.

**8.** Begin the ACPS Surgical Recovery Vitamin Pack that is provided 2 weeks before surgery.





## RECOVERY TIPS FROM A PATIENT'S PERSPECTIVE

For at least one-to-two weeks following your tummy tuck procedure, it will be important for you to pamper and care for yourself and to allow others to, as well. If you're a busy mom who is used to caring for others and running a busy household, it can be tough to switch gears to be on the receiving end of care. However, as one tummy tuck patient and mother of grown children advised, "Be kind to yourself and rest." Doing so will speed your recovery and help you to return to your normal daily routine feeling more refreshed and renewed.

1. If you have young children, you will want to arrange for help to care for them.
2. Some patients plan to have a cleaning service come to their homes prior to their surgery and /or while they are recuperating.
3. Consider preparing or purchasing meals ahead of time that can be frozen and reheated.

## ITEMS TO HAVE ON HAND PRIOR TO YOUR SURGERY

1. Loose, soft clothing such as yoga pants or sweatpants—You'll temporarily be more swollen than usual, so loose clothing will be most comfortable. Also you'll want to avoid with a snug waistband that could potentially irritate your incision.
2. Antibacterial soap for your hands and antibacterial body wash—this will be important to help prevent infection of your incision. In addition, use a hand sanitizer in between washes.
3. Books, magazines, DVDs, recorded television shows, a laptop—these are nice to have on hand while you are recuperating and taking it easy.
4. Laxatives such as Miralax and Ducolax—constipation is common the first week following surgery.
5. A big water bottle—you will need to ensure you drink plenty of water and/or fruit juice to help you stay hydrated—at least 8 cups a day, or 16 cups if you have liposuction in conjunction with a tummy tuck.

## THE DAY BEFORE TUMMY TUCK SURGERY

### To reduce constipation after surgery:

- Eat a liquid diet.
- Have a bowel movement even if a laxative or Fleets enema is required
- To reduce the risk of infection, thoroughly cleanse with antiseptic soap at least the night before and the morning of surgery. Areas of most concern include the armpits, genitalia, and anal areas.
- Do not shave the pubic area.
- Take a Xanax (or sleeping medication) to sleep, if needed.

## SURGERY DAY

Have nothing to eat or drink after midnight. Do not chew gum.

## EVENING AFTER SURGERY

1. Most patients will stay overnight in our fully accredited facility with attentive and prompt care provided.
2. Sequential Compression Devices (SCD's) will be kept on the legs overnight to reduce the risk of blood clots and to eliminate the need to get out of bed for a walk that evening.
3. Many patients (if deemed clinically appropriate) will receive an injection of a blood thinner (Lovenox, Arixtra) for 3 days after surgery to reduce the risk of blood clots.
4. Dressing and garment change will occur between 5 a.m-6 a.m. the morning after surgery.
5. Discharge from our surgery center will occur at about 7 am.

## DAYS 1-3 AFTER TUMMY TUCK SURGERY

1. During surgery, an automatic pain pump will be inserted that infuses a non-narcotic local anesthetic into the area of the abdomen where the muscle wall has been repaired. Alternatively, a long-acting local anesthetic injection may be given in the same area for pain control. This will reduce discomfort, though it will not eliminate it completely. Pain medication will be required, and it is better to take it and get up and around than to lay all day avoiding movement for fear of pain.
2. Getting out of bed and walking with assistance for 10-15 minutes every two hours during normal waking hours is critically important to speed recovery and reduce the risk of clots.
3. Beginning on the 2nd day after surgery, you may shower with assistance using an antiseptic soap such as Dial. The shower should be equipped with a stable plastic sitting stool. A hand-held showerhead can be helpful, as well. You should NOT be left alone in the shower as it is common to experience lightheadedness and unsteadiness. Bathtub showers are difficult to use and should be avoided during your recovery because of the challenge that is presented to get in and out of them.
4. To avoid straining the incision line, walking in a slightly flexed (stooped) position at the hips is required for 4-7 days, gradually becoming more upright each day.
5. Flexion and extension of the feet at the ankles activates the calf muscles and pumps blood out of the legs, reducing risk of blood clots. This should be done consistently throughout the day while awake.
6. Eating a light diet of foods that are easily digestible (to avoid constipation), high in protein (improves wound healing), and low in salt (reduces swelling) is ideal.
7. An ACPS certified home healthcare provider will come to your place of stay in Houston on the second and third days after surgery to assist and teach wound care and dressing change.
8. Constipation is common, especially when using pain medication. We advise regular use of laxatives for the first week or so and drinking plenty of water (at least 8-12 cups a day)
9. Alternating or adjusting resting positions is helpful to avoid muscle stiffness and tightness.



DAYS 3-5 AFTER TUMMY TUCK SURGERY

- 1. Gradually increasing light activity is recommended. Walking without assistance for 15-30 minutes every two hours and improving posture should be pursued.
- 2. A family member should have been trained to assist with dressing changes once daily by now, usually done after a shower.
- 3. You may still need assistance when showering.
- 4. It is advisable to shower after bowel movements.
- 5. Avoiding contact with animals reduces the risk of infection.
- 6. Avoiding contact with ill family members is mandatory.
- 7. Continue to eat a high protein diet with limited salt intake.

RECOVERY TIP FROM A PATIENT'S PERSPECTIVE

“During the first week of my recovery after tummy tuck surgery, I was wondering if I had done the right thing. But after the first week, I turned a corner—it got better and better. What really helped me was having the postsurgical therapeutic massages at Dr. Patronella’s Added Touch Medical Spa. They helped to ease swelling and discomfort tremendously.”

A., Missouri City, TX

DAYS 5-7 AFTER TUMMY TUCK SURGERY

- 1. You will become progressively more mobile with about 30% of your time spent up and about in the home engaging in light activities such as walking, sitting, flexing at the knees and hips, and limited household duties.
- 2. No driving or exercising.
- 3. It is normal to have a slight stoop while walking, progressing to a fully upright standing position by 7-8 days.
- 4. Incisional care is simplified to cleansing with mild soap and water followed by the application of steri-strips (supportive paper tape), which we will provide for you. These are to be changed about every 3-4 days for 5-6 weeks. If an allergic reaction occurs, indicated by redness, irritation, whelps or blistering, remove the strips and notify my clinical care team.
- 5. Most sutures (stitches) are dissolvable; only a few suture tags require removal.
- 6. Usually the pain pump catheter and the drains are removed in this time frame. Being freed from the suction drains and the pain catheter provides some relief and added comfort.

DAYS 7-10 AFTER TUMMY TUCK SURGERY

- 1. Fully upright walking is expected, though it may be slightly tight and uncomfortable initially.
- 2. Leaving the home to attend indoor activities is encouraged. Riding in a car is acceptable, but should be limited to no more than 30 minutes at a time. Lengthy drives in a car or a plane can predispose a post operative patient to blood clots and should be avoided.
- 3. Walking for half a mile twice a day in cool temperatures is encouraged.

RECOVERY TIPS FROM A PATIENT'S PERSPECTIVE

“When you’re recovering from surgery, look six weeks down the road to the great clothes you’ll be able to wear. That’s the great fun—trying on clothes you never thought you’d be able to wear and seeing how great you look in them! You’re going to love your new tummy.”

M., Humble, Texas

DAYS 10-14 DAYS AFTER TUMMY TUCK SURGERY

- 1. Increasing walks to one mile twice a day in cool temperatures improves mobility and prepares you for return to work during this time.
- 2. Usually a minimum of 10 full days of recovery is required before you can return to work with light duty restrictions: no lifting, stooping, prolonged standing (two hours or more), physical exertion, or strenuous activity.
- 3. Continue incisional care with twice weekly application of new steri-strips.
- 4. Driving is allowed at the 12-14 day point if you are fully mobile, have good torso turning ability, and do not require pain medication.

WEEKS 2 TO 4 AFTER TUMMY TUCK SURGERY

- 1. Exercise is limited to brisk walking or a stationary bicycle for 45-60 minutes. Be careful to avoid straining or lifting.
- 2. Travel should be limited to short trips of no more than one hour in a plane or car.

WEEKS 4 TO 6 AFTER TUMMY TUCK SURGERY

- 1. Patients are beginning to feel pretty good by now, so the tendency is to push harder with physical activity. The key to avoiding a setback is to progress slowly and cautiously. Keeping the exercise routine to about 75% of what you feel you are capable of is prudent at this juncture.
- 2. While increasing aerobic exercise with walking, stationary bicycle, or elliptical trainer, proceed with caution, avoiding abdominal straining at all times. Light upper body weights for toning is acceptable as long as there is minimal abdominal work required.
- 3. Swimming may begin.
- 4. Travel in a plane or car should be limited to 2 hours, with a short walk at the midway point to ensure good venous circulation in the legs.
- 5. Continued use of steri-strips through the 5-6 week mark is beneficial for optimal protection and support of the incision.

WEEKS 6-12 AFTER TUMMY TUCK SURGERY

- 1. Progressively increasing exercise tolerance to full capacity is acceptable as long as it is reached gradually. You may begin incorporating more strenuous exercises such as aerobic exercise, jogging, Pilates and yoga. Isolated abdominal exercise (sit-ups, crunches, etc.) are not allowed until a full 12 weeks from the date of surgery has been reached. Weight lifting can proceed with caution, avoiding intense abdominal straining until the full 12-week mark.
- 2. Travelling more than 2 hours in a plane or car is acceptable, as long as a short walk is taken every hour during the trip. An aisle seat for plane travel is advised.
- 3. The ACPS Scar Therapy Program begins at 5-6 weeks. Several products are used to optimize the appearance of the scar. Treatment is required for 6-12 months depending on scar responsiveness. Consistent use and patience is essential.

In the months following tummy tuck surgery, it is common to experience numbness, which may take one to two years to diminish, and occasional twinges of pain in the abdomen. In addition, swelling may come and go for months. To help alleviate this, compression shapewear such as Spanx can be worn. This can be purchased online or at department stores.

For Dr. Patronella’s patients, tummy tuck surgery is enormously rewarding for the aesthetic transformation and accompanying increase in self-confidence that it provides. The results are long lasting provided that you follow healthy eating and exercise habits that help you to maintain a stable weight. Many patients find that tummy tuck surgery inspires them to implement positive lifestyle habits that help them to feel their best and maintain their attractive new contours.

### THE TUMMY TUCK SCAR

In a tummy tuck procedure, an incision is most commonly made from one hip to the other. To diminish the appearance of the scar, Dr. Patronella incorporates a scar therapy program into the post-operative care of his tummy tuck patients. The products in this regimen are designed to provide an optimal healing environment for the scar in order to soften its appearance.

The tummy tuck scar will continue to fade over a period of one to two years. To prevent darkening of the scar, liberally apply sunscreen to the scar, and avoid exposing it to the sun.

### ACPS SCAR THERAPY PROGRAM

Careful attention to early incisional treatment and the resulting scar can make a dramatic difference in its appearance. Continuous use of steri-strips for the first 5-6 weeks provides good protection and support for the early incision. Occasionally, skin irritation occurs with steri-strips, requiring a brief (2-3 days) interval without the strips, applying a mild steroid cream (1% hydrocortisone) and Vitamin E / silicone gel to re-establish moisture and skin conditioning instead.

If there is a true allergic reaction, the strips will be discontinued and the scar therapy regimen will be implemented once the reaction has resolved. Several products may be recommended during scar treatment. It is important for each patient to assess tolerance and provide feedback.

**1. Retinol or Retin-A**—Applied nightly to cleansed skin on the scar directly, this cream is an exfoliant for the scar surface, reducing thickness and unwanted pigmentation. Retinol should not be used until the 6-week mark to reduce the chance of irritation. This product will often cause dryness with flaking and irritation, requiring supplemental moisturizers such as Vitamin E/Aloe. If the skin irritation is severe, discontinuation for a brief 2-3 day interval is required. Some patients will only tolerate an every other night application.

**2. Silicone Gel**—Applied nightly over the retinol and in the morning over a moisturizer (Vitamin E/ aloe), silicone gel assists in flattening scars and sealing in natural oils to maintain skin hydration and conditioning.

**3. Vitamin C/E in silicone carrier**—A very good alternative for those intolerant of retinol, or as a substitute. The Vitamin C is also an exfoliant, reducing surface scar and pigmentation. The Vitamin E is a conditioner/ moisturizer.

**4. Hydroquinone 4%**—A strong bleaching agent, this product may be required in those patients who have a greater tendency to hyperpigment. This is commonly seen in darker skinned people (Blacks, Hispanics, Asian, Indian, Middle Eastern, etc.) and requires early attention to prevent hyperpigmentation.

**5. Scar Recovery Gel with Centelline™**—A blend of patented therapeutic ingredients clinically-proven to reduce scar visibility.

## ADDED TOUCH PROGRAM TO SUPPORT RECOVERY



As part of a comprehensive approach to providing his patients with attentive care throughout the entire surgical process, Dr. Patronella developed an “Added Touch” program consisting of services that are specially designed to support and speed patients’ healing following surgery. This includes:

#### • Home Health Visit

As part of this exclusive service, patients recovering in the Houston area are offered a private visit to their homes or hotel accommodations a day or two after their surgery from a certified medical professional. This skillful staff member will change your bandages, educate your caregiver in providing appropriate care techniques, and provide Dr. Patronella with an update on your recovery.

#### • Therapeutic Massage

This gentle massage blends lymphatic and Swedish massage techniques to provide the following benefits:

- Stimulate the lymphatic system to reduce bruising and swelling
- Help you to regain your flexibility and range-of-motion
- Stimulate nerve endings to help diminish numbness

#### • Vitamin Recovery Support Program

Taken for two weeks prior to surgery and two weeks after, these vitamins are formulated with nutrients that speed wound healing, support the immune system, prevent infection, minimize inflammation, and reduce bruising. Known for their beneficial role in the healing process, these nutrients include vitamin A, vitamin C, copper, selenium, bioflavonoids, bromelain, quercetin, and homeopathic Arnica Montana.

While this guide is comprehensive, most patients will have some questions after surgery that may not have been anticipated. We are always available during your recovery to assist you with any questions or concerns you may have. You may reach us by calling our office at 713.799.9999.

*Dr. Chris Patronella was inspired to develop his unique approach to abdominoplasty—the True Form Tummy Tuck™—by his desire to create results that more authentically captured the subtle features and smooth, elegant beauty of a youthful abdomen. The True Form Tummy Tuck restores the abdomen’s firmness and soft contour nuances while preventing the “artificially flat, board-like look” and other undesirable surgical characteristics that traditional tummy tuck methods often produce.*

