

## **Plastic Surgery: Tummy tuck can help with baby blues**

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**Plastic Surgery**

Certainly those little bundles of joy have brought tremendous blessings into your life - diapers, carpools, smart-mouth teenagers, etc.

The physical cost of childbearing, however, can be quite high.

Once six-packed, rock-hard abs can be melted to rounded, poochy bulges. Tight tummy skin can become an apron of stretch marks, drooping like a dispirited sail in a slack wind.

One technique that plastic surgeons use for covering skin defects after surgery or trauma is tissue expansion. This involves placing balloons under the skin to stretch it out, in order to make more skin to cover the defect.

Imagine how much skin you make if you take an eight-pound baby, wrap it in a uterus and placenta, and put THAT in your stomach. Imagine the stretching, the extra skin, the weakening muscles - you get the idea.

The same thing can happen after a large weight loss. A once protuberant tummy has been deflated, and the excess skin creates problems with the fitting of clothes and personal hygiene. Although weight loss can substantially improve self image, it is not reinforcing to have an unattractive bolt of flesh hanging over the belt line. This is the most common reason men undergo abdominoplasty.

Abdominoplasty, or tummy tuck, is a procedure designed to remove excess skin and tighten abdominal muscles.

In general, it is not designed to remove a lot of fat - that is more the role of dieting or liposuction.

The operation involves an incision that extends along the bikini line from hip to hip. The loose skin is freed up from the underlying muscle up to the level of the rib cage. Usually there is an incision around the umbilicus (bellybutton), because when all that loose skin is pulled down, the umbilicus would be in the wrong place. Instead, it is relocated where it belongs.

Stitches are placed in the muscles of the abdomen ("the stitch of a thousand sit-ups") to tighten and shape the abdominal contour. The extra skin is pulled down and trimmed. There are a couple of drains placed under the skin for a few days to prevent fluid accumulation. A girdle-like compression garment is worn for a few weeks to help further mold the shape.

Lifting, heavy exercise or any major abdominal crunch-type of maneuver is limited for 6 to 8 weeks. Gentle aerobic exercise can be restarted within a week or so. Most patients are sore and uncomfortable for a few days, but don't report the pain to be as bad as a C-section or a hysterectomy, for instance.

Depending on job requirements, patients take from 1 to 3 weeks off of work.

As with any operation, problems, such as infection or healing, can occur with abdominoplasty. Scarring or malposition of the bellybutton can occur. This is a real operation - there may be some numbness around the incisions for a few months.

The cost of the procedure varies according to an individual's needs. Not all operations are the same. Some people have hernias or other conditions which complicate the procedure.

Costs involved are the surgeon's fee, surgery center costs and anesthesia. The "mini-abdominoplasty," which involves excess skin removal below the umbilicus, is useful in some patients.

Patient satisfaction with abdominoplasty is generally high. Clothes fit better, shape is improved and self-image is enhanced.

It may even make those little bundles a little more joyous.

*Dr. Alan Muskett is a board certified plastic surgeon at Billings Plastic Surgery. More information is available at [the group's Web site](#).*