



TUMMY TUCK 101



OUR EXPERT: CYNTHIA DIEHL, MD. BOARD-CERTIFIED PLASTIC SURGEON, DIEHL PLASTIC SURGERY

Pregnancy can change your body forever. You may experience unsightly stretch marks that fade but never fully disappear. You also may develop loose skin that never returns to its former elasticity, or you may experience a loss of muscle tightness, contributing to a saggy look around your abdomen. Some women may continue to have that abdominal fullness long after their children are born, and perhaps even long after their children have grown up.

Diet and exercise can help your body return to its former shape. However, it may not be enough. For many mothers the more dramatic and permanent changes require more involved interventions, such as body contouring with plastic surgery.

“The rectus (six pack) muscles stretch and occasionally separate with the pregnancy, and do not always return to their normal, tight position after delivery of the child,” says Dr. Cynthia Diehl of Diehl Plastic Surgery. “Many women are left with what is called a rectus diastasis, where the muscles

are still separated, along with laxity of the skin and stretch marks. All of this contributes to a loose tummy with a rounded belly look that they didn’t have before pregnancy.”

Getting a tummy tuck is a popular option for dealing with the loose skin, weak muscles and even stretch marks post-pregnancy. There are two primary surgical options for those wanting to undergo this procedure: the mini tummy tuck and the full tummy tuck.

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“Usually a mini abdominoplasty (tummy tuck) will fix the muscle separation from the belly button down to just above the

pubic bone and remove the excess skin from the lower abdomen,” explains Dr. Diehl. The benefits of the mini tummy tuck are that “the scar tends to be shorter, the surgical time is shorter, the recovery may be slightly faster and the cost is usually less.”

However, there are downsides to this procedure, she says. “This will not fix the muscle separation on the upper abdomen and will not remove the looseness in the skin above the belly button.” In addition, “unless a patient has just the right anatomy for this surgery (a rectus diastasis below the belly button and loose skin in the lower abdomen only), they may be dissatisfied with the result. In some patients the belly button gets a ‘pulled-down’ appearance or can get displaced in an unnaturally low position on the abdomen. The upper abdominal muscles can also continue to bulge if there is a separation that is not fixed.”

In contrast, a full tummy tuck repairs the muscle separation along the entire length of the abdomen and removes all loose or excess skin.

“The full abdominoplasty tends to give a more complete correction to the changes that occur with pregnancy,” Dr. Diehl says. “It is not unusual to have a patient say that it put them back to their pre-pregnancy body”. “The disadvantages are a longer scar, additional operating room time and higher cost. However, the cost of a full tummy tuck is less than the cost of a mini that later has to be converted to a full because the upper skin has remained or continued to loosen over time. I’ve found that patients may be happy with the results of a mini in the short term but develop more dissatisfaction as the years progress and only half of their abdomen is tight.”

With both surgeries, downtime may require wearing compression garments and having limited mobility. Recovery time varies with each patient but could take as long as a month or more.

A full or a mini tummy tuck can also be combined with other surgeries or treatment methods in order to get the best possible result. For example, breast lift, breast augmentation, or liposuction are often used with both surgeries to create more dramatic body contouring. “Liposuction can remove fat from the abdomen, flanks, and thighs very effectively,” Dr. Diehl shares. “The purpose of liposuction is to change the shape of a specific area. For some women, liposuction may be all that is necessary for optimal body contouring. If the skin is elastic, the expectation is that it will shrink down to the new size and there won’t be any additional looseness after the fat is

removed. The ideal liposuction patient has tight skin (good elasticity) and is relatively close to their goal body weight. “

Ultimately, determining the best procedure, or combination of procedures will depend on your own personal circumstances. It is best to meet with a board certified plastic surgeon and have an assessment of your health, skin / fat, and muscle tone. Most importantly, discuss your expectations and then consider how the recommendations fit in with your lifestyle and budget. Together you and your doctor can make the best decision to help you achieve your goals. 🍏

quick facts

- A mini tummy tuck is a procedure done to remove the bulge under your navel.
- A mini tummy tuck can either be performed under local or general anesthesia, and it only takes about an hour or two to finish.
- Requires fewer incisions which promote faster healing, less discomfort and a fewer chances of infection.
- Most surgeons combine a tummy tuck with liposuction to better trim and sculpt the body.

