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## **Care after Abdominal Panniculectomy**

This page contains answers to frequently asked questions regarding your care after an abdominal panniculectomy. This information will help you remember the instructions given to you after surgery.

### **What will I see when I look into a mirror?**

You will have mild bruising and swelling of the abdominal skin. You will have an incision that extends from hip to hip in the bikini area. You may also have an incision around the umbilicus if you had an abdominoplasty added to your panniculectomy procedure. There may be a “ruffled” appearance to the closure, which is normal and will flatten with time. If you had full abdominal contouring in addition to the panniculectomy, it will be difficult to stand up straight for several days, and your abdomen will feel tight. The contour of your abdomen will not take its final shape for several weeks after the surgery.

### **When can I shower or take a bath?**

You may not shower until after your first post op visit. Your original dressings and binder from surgery should remain on until your scheduled post op follow up appointment. You may sponge bathe, but no showers until your drains are removed.

### **How do I care for my drains?**

Your drains are held in place with stitches to your skin and should always be supported to avoid pulling on the drain. The easiest method is to safety pin the drain bulb to your abdominal binder or clothing. Drains are generally removed within 7 to 10 days after your surgery. Monitor and record your drain amounts individually. Bring your drain record with you to your post op follow up appointments. The drain amount totals dictate when the drains will be removed.

### **Should I wear a tummy support?**

For your comfort, we recommend that you wear an abdominal support garment for 6 weeks following your surgery, removing the garment only for bathing. You can wear the surgical binder provided to you for several weeks. Most patients find that a spandex or

Lycra waist and tummy shaping garment are most comfortable to wear as a second stage garment, around 4 weeks post op. We will advise you of your garment options before surgery and again at your post-operative visits. Whatever you choose, it should be easy and comfortable for you to put on and remove. After 12 weeks, you may discontinue all support garments.

### **What can I do after surgery?**

You will gradually be able to stand upright over the first week. Many patients find it easier to sleep in a recliner for a few days after the surgery, especially if you had a hernia repair and/or full abdominal contouring added to the panniculectomy. We encourage you to walk the same day after surgery, but please have someone assist you for the first few days. You should not lift anything heavier than 5 pounds or participate in heavy exercise for six weeks after the surgery. After six weeks, gradually return to your normal activities and exercise routines. Depending on the type of work you do, you should be able to return to work in 4-6 weeks or as soon as you are comfortable. If your job does not require heavy activity, you should be able to go back in 3-4 weeks. Hernia repair patients are to check with their hernia surgeon regarding additional restrictions

### **When can I drive?**

You generally should be able to drive about five to seven days after surgery if you feel up to it. You should never drive if you are still taking any prescription pain medication other than Tylenol.

### **How much pain will I have?**

The most discomfort that you will have lasts 5 to 7 days, sometimes a little longer. As you feel more comfortable, your need for pain medication will be less.

### **What medications should I use?**

We will prescribe a prescription pain medication for you and we may also have you take an antibiotic. Follow the directions on the bottle for their use. The prescription pain medication may make you feel drowsy. Have someone assist you at home and do not attempt to drive while you are taking the prescription pain medication. A few days after surgery, most patients will find that Tylenol will take care of the discomfort. Do not use aspirin or ibuprofen (Motrin) for 7-10 days after the surgery.

### **Can I drink alcohol?**

Do not drink alcohol for 5 days after your surgery or while taking prescription pain medicines.

When will I be seen in the office after surgery?

You will normally be seen in the office within one week of your surgery and then at about two weeks, four weeks, six weeks, three months, and six months after surgery to monitor healing. Additional appointments may be necessary.

### **How will I know if I am having a problem?**

Urgent problems after abdominal panniculectomy do not occur frequently. These are the complications that will require a change in your post-operative care:

**Hematoma** (blood collecting under your incisions) can occur within a few days of your surgery.

The warning signs are:

- Severe pain that does not respond to medication
- Significant swelling in your abdomen
- Excessive or growing bruising

**Infection** is rare following abdominal panniculectomy. It is normal to have a small amount of drainage from the incisions and around your belly button for a few days.

Signs of infection are:

- Increased temperature
- Increasing drainage from the incisions
- Increasing redness around the incisions

**Leg swelling** (with or without associated pain) may indicate a problem with the vein circulation in your leg(s). Although some swelling is to be expected due to your surgery, intravenous fluids given to you during the surgery, and your decreased level of activity, this swelling is normally mild, painless, and affects both legs evenly. If you have a large amount of leg swelling (either one or both legs), or if you experience pain in your legs, contact the office immediately.

**Breathing problems** after abdominal panniculectomy are rare but can be a serious complication. If you develop any chest and/or back pain or shortness of breath, you must contact our office or be seen in the nearest emergency medical facility without delay.

**Medication reactions** may occur with the drugs prescribed for you. If you develop a skin rash, itching, vomiting, or diarrhea, stop taking your medication and contact my office.

If you have any of the above problems or other questions, contact my office at 440-461-7999

