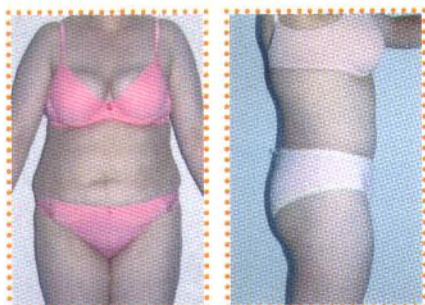


# abdominoplasty surgery

Plastic Surgical Masters surgeon Dr John Masters explains the tummy tuck. Formally described as an abdominoplasty, this plastic surgical procedure is used to **re-shape, flatten, define and firm** the abdomen.

**Although** referred to as “a **tummy tuck**”, there are actually several varieties of abdominoplasty and they form a sub-set of the group the procedures collectively known as body contouring procedures. The fundamental surgical manoeuvres in body contouring are liposuction and the excision, or removal, of excess skin and subcutaneous tissue.

Patient : Female - 30 years old, 2 children.



Nov 04 - before circumferential abdominoplasty

Jan 05 - 3 month follow up

Tummy tucks can be performed on males, but are far more commonly requested by females. Typically patients present with excessive skin forming an overhanging abdominal roll or bulge that may or may not be associated with excess fatty tissue.

The skin below the umbilicus (tummy button) is usually stretch marked and exhibits poor elasticity and tone. The usual cause is having been stretched beyond the skin's ability to cope during pregnancy. Other typical patient presentations include patients following large weight loss or with a lower abdominal bulge primarily due to muscle separation with minimal excess skin and fat.

Abdominoplasty patients like most plastic surgical patients, are not seeking the perfect physique and appearance but rather are attempting to return certain aspects of their body which they perceive as being abnormal or damaged back towards a more normal appearance. With this physical improvement usually comes a significant psychological boost. Many patients have developed coping methods to help disguise the fact that they have concerns regarding their abdominal appearance such as wearing loose fitting and bulky clothing and avoiding social situations where body form is more apparent such as exercise and swimming. These effects are seen in both males and females and are apparent regardless of the cause of the perceived deformity.

Traditionally most abdominoplasties have been performed on females to improve some of the less flattering aspects of previous pregnancies; increasingly however more abdominoplasties are being performed on patients who have successfully lost large amounts of weight. Frequently these patients do not feel they have completed their weight loss journey until they can look in the mirror and not see the excess loose and flabby skin. Many feel depressed and resentful that they have done the hard work to lose the weight and yet still appear large due to the excess skin that will not go away regardless of how much weight they lose or exercise they do.

An abdominoplasty is a significant surgical procedure and as such needs

to be performed by an appropriately trained and experienced plastic surgeon in a fully staffed and equipped facility. Although uncommon, complications can and do occur, and they can be life threatening. Possible risks include bleeding requiring a transfusion, sensory nerve damage, infection, delayed wound healing, prolonged wound drainage and blood clots in the legs. Abdominoplasty is not recommended for patients with significant medical conditions or a woman planning further pregnancies.

Although there is some weight loss associated with the removal of excess tissue, abdominoplasty is not a weight loss method, and it is used primarily for the purpose of contour improvement.

To maximise the aesthetic outcome the incisions are placed so that they are hidden by the patient's underwear. At the start of the operation the surgeon makes an incision around the umbilicus down to the underlying muscle layer, this leaves the umbilicus attached to the muscular abdominal wall on its stalk, but completely separated from the surrounding skin.

A transverse incision low on the abdomen is then made, similar to an extended caesarean section incision. Through this incision the entire skin and fatty layer of the abdomen is lifted off the muscle layer all the way up to the rib margin. The entire skin/fat flap, except the umbilicus, can then be advanced towards the patient's feet and the excess removed.



Typically this is all of the skin from above the pubic hairline to the hole where the tummy button was freed from. Thus the poorest quality skin, with the most stretchmarks and the underlying fatty tissue, is thrown away! The upper abdominal skin, previously loose and slightly redundant, now becomes firmer as it stretches down to cover the entire abdominal surface. The thickness of its underlying fatty tissue also halves as, like the skin, it is now covering twice the surface area.

Patient : Male - 27 years old.



Oct 04 - before circumferential abdominoplasty

Nov 04 - 4 weeks and 1 operation later!

Judicious use of liposuction can further enhance this thinning. Prior to closing the skin incision the rectus abdominis muscles (paired vertical muscles of the abdomen that form the 'six-pack') are sutured back to each other in the midline thus repairing the stretch/separation between them usually caused by pregnancy. This suturing back to the

midline cinches in the waistline and improves the muscular dynamics of the torso.

With the incision now closed and the scar positioned to be hidden by the underwear, a small hole is through the skin where the umbilicus is going to be sited and the umbilicus is returned to the skin surface, a normal position relative to the waistline and hips. Tummy tucks are typically combined with liposuction to the waistline, thighs and buttocks to further enhance the contouring transformation.

The operation takes two to four hours to perform and usually involves an overnight hospital stay. You will have surgical drains for ten to fourteen days and be asked to wear a compression garment for three weeks. Most patients require two weeks off work. It is moderately painful for the first two to four days, but this is controllable with oral medication after the first night. Dissolving sutures are used in the skin so there are none to be removed. For the best quality scar, patients are encouraged to tape their scar for three months post-operatively.

Less commonly performed variations of abdominoplasty include the mini abdominoplasty and the extended abdominoplasty (also known as the circumferential abdominoplasty or belt lipectomy). The former is primarily

used to recontour the lower abdominal bulge which can occur with rectus abdominis muscle separation but is not necessarily associated with either skin excess or fatty tissue excess. Using a laproscope, the muscles are sutured together in the midline through a small incision above the pubic hairline and only a small amount of excess skin is removed. Sometimes the umbilical stalk is separated from the muscles layer at its base and moved inferiorly as much as two centimetres, this allows the surgeon better access to the muscles for the repair and also a larger amount of skin to be removed without necessarily having the full incision from a standard anterior abdominoplasty.

The circumferential abdominoplasty, as its name implies, removes excess skin and fatty tissue from the entire waistline both front and back. Once again the resulting scar is positioned to be disguised by the underwear.

This operation has the advantage of removing more skin, particularly over the lateral waistline, and hence achieves a better final contour in patients who have a greater degree of skin excess. Surprisingly, although far more extensive the recovery period for a circumferential abdominoplasty is very similar to a standard abdominoplasty.

# my tummy tuck experience

As described by patient Jo Newbery. I had my first child by caesarean at the age of 18 and although I should have enjoyed my pregnancy, the minute the first angry stretch mark tore across my stomach, I started to feel miserable, scarred and powerless to change it.

Deep stretch marks bred like there was no stopping them from above my tummy button right down to my thighs and as if that wasn't enough...I had a caesarean scar thrown in! You hear it said so many times but it is true...no matter how much I dieted and exercised my body would never return to how it used to be and that did absolutely nothing for my self-esteem. Four years later I had my second child and my body duly responded with even more stretch marks, saggy skin and an even longer caesarean scar!

*"To think that in a matter of weeks I would be waking up with a new body... was awesome"*

During 2004 we decided to immigrate to New Zealand. It was a life-changing move and being there gave me the opportunity to concentrate on ways to further improve my life. I only worked part time and took every other opportunity to go to the gym and to concentrate on getting myself into good shape. It was during this time that I made the decision to start researching plastic surgeons on the Internet. It seemed such a waste of my life being so miserable about my stomach. I knew it could be improved so I decided to seek a professional opinion. I checked out the list of registered plastic surgeons in New Zealand and then further checked out their profiles, location, specialised fields and history. I had two surgeons in mind and feeling a little nervous I emailed Plastic Surgical Masters for further information. An envelope arrived a day later packed with details

of the abdominoplasty procedure and much more. After reading the information I felt the extra momentum to go ahead and book a consultation. Leanne Masters dealt with my booking, she was reassuring, friendly and very helpful, which in hindsight made a huge impact on me and gave me a 'friend' at the beginning of my surgical journey.

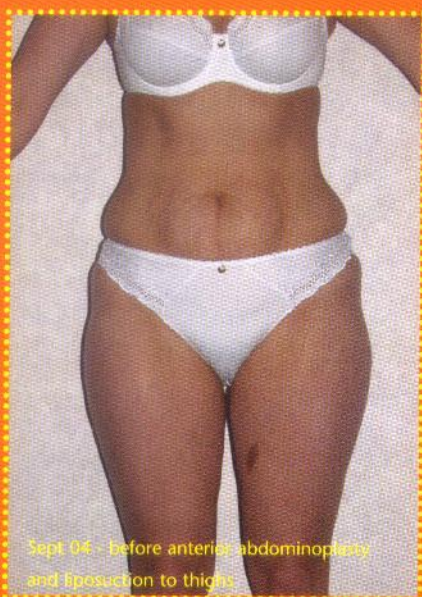
I must admit to feeling horribly nervous on the 2.5-hour journey down to Wellington. Everything ran through my mind: fear of the anaesthetic, surgical complications, dying during surgery, leaving my children behind in the name of vanity etc! But at the forefront of my mind was the sheer horror and embarrassment at actually having to bare my stomach to the surgeon! When I arrived for my consultation John Masters warmly greeted me and I immediately started to feel at ease. During my consultation and armed with my list of questions, I discussed my 'most hated' areas, firstly my stomach and then the contour of my upper thighs and hips. After a chaperoned and surprisingly 'non embarrassing' examination, Dr Masters bounced back suggestions and ensured that I had very real expectations of what surgery could achieve. He suggested that I could get good results from a full tummy tuck with muscle tightening and also a satisfactory result with lipo to my inner/outer thighs and hip area. I was keen to have the liposuction at the same time as my tummy tuck to avoid having to have two separate surgeries. We went through the list of benefits and the risk of complications and I came away

feeling very positive and highly informed.

A few days later a summary of my consultation arrived with costs attached and although I had intended to get a second opinion with another surgeon, I trusted my instincts and felt that Dr Masters had answered all my questions, been very factual about the risks and had been open when I asked him if I could contact some of his previous patients for recommendation and their experiences. I felt pretty sick with relief and anxiety but I immediately emailed Leanne for possible surgery dates. Whilst she suggested giving them 10-12 weeks notice I pressed for an earlier date.

My surgery was booked for 5 weeks later on the 28th September 2004! As I lived so far away, Leanne couriered all the information, blood test documentation, pre surgery instructions etc., through the post. I had to send Leanne my body measurements for the post surgery garment and I also went to the local medical clinic for pre-op blood tests. The tests came back fine and my surgery date was confirmed. That's the moment I suddenly felt overwhelmed! To think that in a matter of weeks I would be waking up with a new body and the thought of not feeling so down about myself every day was awesome.

To fast forward a little, the next few weeks involved plenty of sleepless nights – nerves, guilt, excitement--you name it! The morning of my surgery I woke up very early, prepared myself with the medical shower-wash and we drove down to Wellington. I was



Sept 04 - Before anterior abdominoplasty and liposuction to thighs



Nov 04 - 2 months later



12 months later

booked in for surgery at the Southern Cross Hospital, Newtown. The staff nurse greeted me and showed me to my room. Dr Masters arrived soon after and was very fresh faced and jovial, which was very comforting as I was mentally in between over-excited and hysterically anxious! He got his 'permanent' marker pen out and drew some fancy circles all over my stomach, hips and thighs! He once again explained the surgical procedure to me and then left to prepare. I had the most amazing anaesthetist, so friendly and reassuring. She gave me a sedative injection to calm my nerves and inserted a line for the anaesthetic. I was then wheeled into the pre-surgery room! Unfortunately this was not to be the day of my surgery. After a few hours of waiting, I was told by a very apologetic and very upset Dr Masters that the hospital back up generator has failed and that it was far too risky to go ahead with the surgery on that day. I was devastated. My husband drove me home and I sobbed all the way! It could only happen to me!!

Leanne contacted me as soon as I got home. She was as mortified as me and booked me in for surgery the following week. At least I knew what to expect this time around. Tuesday 5th October - I went through the same pre-op routine and this time around I got through the theatre doors! Wow, I have to tell you that when I woke up I was speechless, totally astounded to look down and see the flattest washboard

stomach ever! It was better than my pre-pregnancy stomach. I just couldn't stop smiling and crying at the same time! I wasn't in pain, but the anaesthetic did make me feel very nauseous which was controlled by medication. I had gone for the surgery with very real expectations, and no illusions of entering the world of modelling ha ha...but Dr Masters had surpassed himself in my eyes. I was thrilled to bits. I spent one night in hospital and left the following afternoon. It wasn't very pleasant prising myself into my surgical garment and the journey home wasn't the most comfortable either, but all the same it was wonderful knowing that I was now on the road to recovery. The following week wasn't the greatest, but I expected no more! It involved days in bed, very slow trips to the bathroom, and back-ache from being so stooped over...but, on the other hand...I have to admit to endless visits to the mirror to admire my flat stomach and newly contoured thighs! Even with the recovery swelling the difference was incredible.

It actually took me around 3 weeks to be able to walk fully upright. I had asked Dr Masters to remove as many of my stretch marks as possible, so I only had myself to blame for this! My liposuction areas were more painful than my tummy tuck, sometimes I felt like my flesh was tearing or burning but I found massaging the areas really helped. I started to get out for short walks after 10 days, progressing to 30

minute daily walks after 3 weeks. I was keen to do everything I could to enhance the results of the surgery and I couldn't wait to get back to the gym. My first gym session was 2 months post surgery, just gentle cardio and very, very light weights. I could see the results almost immediately. It was amazing.

It's now nearly 12 months since my surgery. The scar has almost faded now and my lipo areas are smoother and keep improving with each passing month. I am ecstatic with the results, I feel very proud of myself for being brave enough to go through with it because it has truly changed my life. I'm also grateful that my family supported my decision. I have dropped two dress sizes, thanks to the surgery and to ongoing exercise and now I have so much more confidence. I don't worry about my saggy stomach anymore. In fact I don't even think about it...I can now fill my mind with much nicer thoughts and goals. The other great thing about this whole experience is that I found two new friends! It sounds very corny I know, but Leanne and John were incredibly supportive, open and encouraging. They changed my life and made my surgical experience a very comfortable one, and for that I will always be grateful.

*"I am ecstatic with the results, I feel very proud of myself for being brave enough to go through with it because it has truly changed my life."*