

**(Parkland Life Column for May 2009)**

## **The “Mommy Procedure”**

By David J. Levens, MD, PA, FACS

Happy Mother’s Day, Parkland Life Moms! Enjoy the well-deserved joys of motherhood today.

Of course, those joys usually do not include the effects that pregnancy can have on a woman’s body, particularly on abdominal muscles, tissue and skin. While similar damage can be caused by aging and massive weight fluctuation, pregnancy is by far the leading culprit. That’s why abdominoplasty (tummy tuck) is sometimes call the “Mommy procedure”.

Pregnancy causes enlargement of the uterus with significant stretching of the tissues of the abdominal wall. After delivery, exercise can help recover the tone in the muscles themselves, but the fascial tissues (which interconnect the muscles) do not respond to exercise. Stretching or looseness of these lower abdominal tissues creates bulging, which no amount of abdominal crunches can correct. There is usually a significant amount of irreversibly stretched, “excess” skin, as well, that cannot be made to disappear through exercise or diet.

For Moms who decide they can’t tolerate “the bulge”, abdominoplasty can effectively eliminate it. Here’s what happens during a traditional abdominoplasty (tummy tuck):

Incisions are placed low on the abdomen for concealment purposes. The length of the incision depends on the degree of looseness in the skin and how much will need to be removed. An 8-10” incision is typical. Skin and fat are first lifted off the underlying musculature of the abdomen. If the fascial tissue connecting the muscles is stretched, it is tightened by placing multiple sutures. In essence, the underlying framework of the abdomen is reshaped.

The skin and fat are then pulled downward; excess skin and fat are removed. Due to the amount of skin that generally must be removed, it is usually necessary to make an incision around the umbilicus (belly button), leaving a barely perceptible scar inside the umbilicus.

Incisions are closed with sutures placed beneath the skin. Patients can usually shower or bathe 3-5 days after surgery but are asked to wear an elastic garment for two weeks or more after surgery to support the tightened abdominal muscles, minimize fluid collection and swelling, and increase comfort. A long acting local anesthetic is administered via tiny catheters under the skin that results in markedly less discomfort in the first few days –

an innovation increasingly utilized for this and other surgeries. Often, small plastic drainage tubes are used to prevent accumulation of fluid under the skin; they are removed in the surgeon's office several days after surgery. In most cases, patients return to work and social activities within 10-14 days.

Ideally, a tummy tuck should be performed when additional pregnancies are not anticipated, since a subsequent pregnancy would undo the correction.

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