

Care after Abdominal Panniculectomy

This page contains answers to frequently asked questions regarding your care after abdominal panniculectomy. This information will help you to 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. There may be a “ruffled” appearance to the closure. This 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. You may have dark discoloration from dry blood at your incision and this is normal. The belly button incision may develop some crusting that is dried fluid. This is normal and will be cleaned at your first post-op visit.

When can I shower or take a bath?

You normally can shower 24 hours after your surgery using a mild fragrance free soap such as Ivory or Dove. Avoid using very hot water. Your abdomen will be tender, so wash this area gently and pat dry with a clean towel. Allow the area to fully dry before putting on your clothes (usually ½ hour). I will inform you when it is safe to take baths.

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 support or clothing. When you shower, you may temporarily “hang” the drain bulb around a lanyard. The “How to care for your drain” pamphlet has more detailed information. Drains are generally removed within seven to ten days after your surgery.

Should I wear a tummy support?

For your comfort, we recommend that you wear an abdominal support garment for 12 weeks following your surgery removing the garment only for bathing. You can wear the surgical support provided to you for several days- usually until the drains are removed. Most patients find that a spandex or Lycra waist and tummy shaping garment is most comfortable to wear. We will advise you of your garment options before surgery and again at you post operative visits. Whatever you choose, it should be easy and comfortable for you to put on and remove. After six weeks, you may choose to not wear a support garment for brief periods of time. 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 with the panniculectomy. You should walk every day but 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 you normal activities and exercise routines. Depending on the type of work you do, you should be able to return to your job as soon as you are comfortable. If your job does not require heavy activity, you should be able to go back in one to two 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 pain medication other than Tylenol.

How much pain will I have?

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

What medications should I use?

Your surgeon will prescribe a pain medication for you and may also have you take an antibiotic. Follow the directions on the bottle for their use. The pain medication will make you feel drowsy. Have someone assist you in your home and do not attempt to drive while you are taking the 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 five days after the surgery.

Can I drink alcohol?

Do not drink alcohol for five days after your surgery or while taking narcotic 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, six weeks, 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 the feeling of being short of breath you must contact my 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.