

## **Is It Time to Tighten That Abdomen?**

**By Schuyler C. Metlis M.D., F.A.C.S.**

The winter months are a good time to tighten up the abdomen. Most people spend less time in bathing suits (even in Florida!) than during the other three seasons. That allows surgical wounds to heal unnoticed. Wearing thicker or just more clothing makes the sudden change from the old you to the more svelte you seem more natural, and less the result of surgery.

Surgery to contour the abdomen treats the outer portion of the abdomen: the skin, fat, and outer muscle layer. Beneath these are the abdominal cavity containing the stomach, intestines, liver, gallbladder, and such. There is usually fat in this area. The size of the abdominal cavity itself is usually only decreased by weight loss to decrease the amount of fat, or in the case of pregnancy, by having your baby.

Extra skin can be removed. Its most common location is the lower abdomen, and the incision to remove skin is usually placed at the bottom of the lower abdomen, right above the pubic area so the scar won't show in a modest bikini. When the whole abdomen has loose skin, it can all be pulled downward and the excess removed.

The extra fat underneath the skin being removed comes out as well. More fat can be removed by cutting it out from the underside of the skin, or by using liposuction. For some younger people, or those who do not need too much fat removed, the skin will shrink by itself after liposuction. For older people, or those who need to have a lot of fat removed, extra skin will have to be removed by the surgeon.

The outer layer of the muscles, known as the fascia, can be tightened to reshape the abdominal wall. This usually only works after weight loss, or delivery of the baby. This makes the size of the abdominal cavity smaller, and for some women, it can take 2 inches off of their waist.

How much each of these three layers needs to be adjusted is individualized for each patient. Some people need maximum treatment for all three. Others just need some extra overhanging skin removed, or perhaps just the fascia tightened and their abdominal contour markedly improves. An experienced, qualified plastic surgeon will be able to tailor the operation for your individual needs.

Call to find out if you would benefit from an abdominoplasty.

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