



DR A DOUGLAS
PLASTIC SURGERY

BEFORE AND AFTER SURGERY GUIDELINES

It's normal to feel a level of uncertainty before undergoing surgery. Here are some guidelines to assist you in preparation for your upcoming procedure. Please don't hesitate to contact us with any other questions you may have during the course of your treatment.

PRE SURGERY

General Health

Good physical and psychological health is essential for successful plastic surgery. While a medical illness does not necessarily prevent you from undergoing successful plastic surgery, some medical illnesses may increase the risk of a serious condition following surgery.

Medical clearance for surgery

Please ensure that you get medical clearance for any medical illness which may affect your ability to have safe surgery or anaesthesia. Here are some of the more common medical conditions which may affect your surgery:

Hypertension

Elevated blood pressure increases the risk of bleeding during surgery and during the recovery period. This could result in the formation of a haematoma – a collection of blood, which may require additional surgery to drain the haematoma. If left unattended to, haematoma may cause wound complications such as infection, wound breakdown and poor scarring. Your blood pressure should be under control to limit your risk.

Heart attack or heart disease

If you have had a heart attack recently, it could increase your risk of fatal heart attack or arrhythmia during surgery. If you suffer from heart failure, your heart may not be able to withstand the stress of surgery. Discuss the risks with your plastic surgeon and anaesthetist.

Diabetes

People with diabetes are prone to infections and therefore wound healing complications after surgery. Good blood sugar control will limit your risks. Your prescription diabetes medication may need special management prior to, and after, surgery to prevent hypoglycaemia (low blood sugar).

Asthma and COAD

Both severe asthma and COAD (Chronic Obstructive Airways Disease) increase your risk of wound complications and lung complications after surgery. The risks of surgery may outweigh the benefits.

Bleeding disorder

You may have a bleeding disorder if you have experienced prolonged bleeding after dental work or minor surgery, have required a blood transfusion for surgery in the past, have had repeated miscarriages, liver disease, or have a family history of bleeding abnormalities. If so, or if you have been diagnosed with haemophilia, lab tests and a consultation with a haematologist will be needed prior to surgery. A bleeding disorder can put you at risk of excessive bleeding during surgery and require a blood transfusion.

Blood clots

There are a number of variants which could increase your risk of developing a blood clot in the leg (deep vein thrombosis) or lungs (pulmonary embolism). The variants include lengthy surgery, age, smoking, oral contraception or HRT (Hormone Replacement Therapy), cancer, obesity, prolonged bed rest, previous deep vein thrombosis/pulmonary embolism and clotting abnormalities.

Pre and intra-operative measures may be needed to reduce this risk. Early mobilization (with assistance) after surgery will also help improve your circulation.

It's vital to inform your plastic surgeon and anaesthetist if you have any of the above risk factors.

Anaemia

Anaemia, or a low haemoglobin level, will increase your risk of wound-healing complications and may require you to have a blood transfusion in surgery. Blood transfusions do carry a small risk of transmitting blood-borne diseases and should be avoided if possible. Treatment of anaemia with iron supplements may be needed prior to your surgery and consultation with a haematologist may be necessary if you have severe anaemia.

HIV/Aids and hepatitis

HIV/Aids carries an increased risk of wound infection after surgery. If you are healthy, on treatment and living with HIV/Aids, and your CD4 count is above 500 with your viral load undetectable, your surgery risks are similar to that of an HIV-negative person. Hepatitis will preclude you from cosmetic surgery as it may worsen liver disease.

Very importantly, HIV/Aids and hepatitis do increase the risk of infection to the surgical team in the case of blood exposure from an accidental sharps injury (an incident in which a needle, blade or scalpel contaminated with an infected person's blood pierces the skin). Your consent to testing and your openness with your plastic surgeon will be appreciated.

Rheumatoid arthritis and SLE (lupus)

If you have rheumatoid arthritis or lupus and have surgery, you run the risk of increased wound complication and infection, because these connective tissue diseases require treatment with steroids and immunosuppressive medications. Connective tissue disease, if well managed, should not prevent you from having plastic surgery, but you should discuss this with your rheumatologist or medical physician beforehand.

Psychiatric illness

A diagnosis of a psychiatric illness in itself does not prevent you from undergoing plastic surgery, provided it is well managed and you have medical clearance from your psychiatrist to proceed with surgery. Certain mental illnesses such as body dysmorphic disorder should not be treated with surgery and it is advisable to seek psychiatric counselling.

Smoking, recreational drugs and alcohol

It is very important to avoid smoking or secondary smoke six weeks before your surgery and during your recovery period. Smoking is proven to delay healing and is associated with an increased chance of complications after surgery. These include delayed wound healing, wound dehiscence (wound breakdown), poor scarring, infection, breathing problems and blood clots (venous thromboembolism). Please avoid any nicotine containing products, including cigarettes, cigars, pipes and nicotine replacement therapy or e-cigarettes.

Avoiding alcohol before and after surgery is advised. Chronic heavy drinking can lead to liver disease which may affect the metabolism of certain medications and anaesthetic agents. Please inform your plastic surgeon and anaesthetist if you suffer from alcoholism or alcohol dependency as this will increase your risk of life-threatening alcohol withdrawal syndrome after surgery.

The use of recreational drugs can place you at risk of increased complications during surgery and anaesthesia. Drugs like cocaine can dangerously raise your blood pressure, causing bleeding and may cause fatal arrhythmias.

It is very important to be honest about your recreational drug use. Avoiding recreational drugs two weeks prior to surgery is important to limit complications. In the recovery period you should not take prescription medication with recreational drugs or alcohol as this can lead to life-threatening drug interactions.

Allergies

An allergic reaction to medication is potentially life threatening. If you have had an allergic reaction to medication, it is critical to relay this information to your plastic surgeon and anaesthetist, even if the allergy occurred once only, or didn't seem severe at the time.

Allergies to latex or wound dressings can be troublesome and avoiding these products is best. Please inform your plastic surgeon.

Medications

Medications to take: your prescription medication, e.g. your antihypertensive medication should be taken as prescribed by your treating physician and your plastic surgeon.

Medications to stop taking before surgery:

Aspirin, Ecotrin or Ibuprofen for 10 days before surgery, as they can cause bleeding.

Paracetamol (Panado) can be taken as an alternative for pain management.

Warfarin is a blood-thinning medication that can cause severe bleeding. If you are taking Warfarin you will need to stop taking it prior to surgery and change to an injectable blood thinner like Heparin or Clexane.

Hormonal treatments such as the oral contraceptive pill, HRT or Tamoxifen can increase your risk of abnormal clotting. Discuss the need to stop hormonal treatments with your plastic surgeon.

Corticosteroids may be prescribed to treat a variety of medical conditions. Long term use of steroids will increase the risk of delayed wound healing, poor scarring and infection. Chronic steroid use must be discussed with your plastic surgeon.

Supplements

Please avoid the use of any homeopathic, herbal, Chinese medicine or other supplements for two weeks prior to your surgery. Many of these supplements can cause bleeding, high blood pressure and changes in blood glucose, which may adversely affect your surgery.

Garlic, Ginkgo, ginseng, dong quai, salmon oil and high doses of vitamin E can cause increased bleeding.

Echinacea, ephedra, kava and St John's Wort can increase blood pressure and cause drug interactions.

The use of multivitamins is generally safe but should be cleared with your plastic surgeon.

Pregnancy

If you are a woman of child-bearing age, it is advisable to make sure that you are not pregnant prior to surgery. Take a pregnancy test to confirm that you are not pregnant. Elective plastic surgery and anaesthesia may pose unnecessary risk to your pregnancy.

Obesity and dieting

It is best to be at your ideal weight when undergoing plastic surgery. However, a crash diet to get to your ideal weight a few weeks prior to your surgery is definitely not a wise decision. Depriving yourself of essential micronutrients, minerals and proteins prior to surgery may have a detrimental effect on wound healing.

The safe approach is a lifestyle change, which should ideally be started months before your surgery. A healthy eating plan and regular exercise will help get you as close as possible to your goal weight. Enlisting the help of a knowledgeable dietician may be necessary to help you achieve your goal.

Liposuction is ideally suited to shape and contour a specific problematic area that is diet resistant, such as the inner thighs or love handles. Liposuction is not a treatment or quick fix for obesity.

If you have any of the above conditions, it is advisable to get medical clearance before proceeding with your planned plastic surgery.

Motivations and Expectations

This is very important, as unrealistic expectations can lead to unhappiness after surgery. It is important to understand the reasons you have decided to have surgery, and it is even more important to share this information with your plastic surgeon during your consultation. This is critical to achieving the most successful outcome.

Financing and medical aid

Medical aid schemes do not cover cosmetic surgery.

Re-constructive plastic surgery is covered, at least in part, by your medical aid scheme. It is essential to confirm authorisation for your procedure prior to surgery. Financing for cosmetic surgery is possible through cosmetic financing companies. My office will gladly assist you with authorisation and advice regarding financing options.

Risks and complications

Although complications are rare, they do happen and it is essential to be aware of them.

Surgical complications include: bleeding, bruising, infection, swelling, seroma (fluid collection), wound dehiscence, delayed healing, wound necrosis (cell death), fat necrosis, pigmentation, unfavourable results and scarring.

Modern anaesthesia has a very good safety record but complications can occur. Possible anaesthetic complications include nausea and vomiting, difficulty passing urine, sore throat, nerve damage, chest infection, allergic reaction, brain damage, stroke or paralysis, heart attack, blood clots in the lung or legs. This anaesthetist will discuss this further with you before the procedure.

What to do on the night before and the day of surgery

It is important to get a good night's rest the evening before your procedure.

Remember to not eat anything in the six hours before your surgery .

Clear fluids such as water or diluted apple juice is allowed up to 2hrs before surgery.

On the morning of surgery

1. Brush your teeth without swallowing water
2. Avoid cosmetics on the area planned for surgery
3. Take your prescription medication with a sip of water
4. If you are menstruating, use a sanitary pad rather than risk forgetting to remove a tampon
5. Wear your spectacles and not contact lenses
6. Leave your jewellery and valuables at home

What to pack

1. Prescription medication
2. Toothbrush and tooth paste
3. Toiletries
4. Feminine hygiene products
5. Comfortable clothing and sleepwear
6. Comfortable shoes, e.g. slip-ons
7. A book to read may be helpful to keep you distracted while you wait for surgery
8. Medical aid membership card and ID book

Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have any further queries.

POST SURGERY

Recovery after surgery will take time, so don't rush it. Allow yourself time and space to heal. Be prepared and know that we are here to assist you throughout your recovery.

A guide to your recovery

After your surgery you will need to give your body time to heal.

Every person heals and recovers at their speed, so its important to allow for enough time to to rest and relax.

As a general guideline, recovery down-time for abdominoplasty, body lift, combined body and breast procedures and breast reconstruction with an abdominal flap is about six weeks. The first two weeks you will be home bound, mostly in bed and on the couch, the next two weeks you will feel stronger and will be able to do the light home activities of daily living. By week four you can do non-strenuous activities like gentle walking on a treadmill or cycling on a stationary bike and by week six you should be back to doing most of your activities.

You won't be able to drive a car for four weeks after most upper body, breast or body contouring procedures. And you should not lift any heavy objects or do activities that place strain your wounds. You should feel well enough for sexual activity by week three of four. Lower body surgeries like abdominoplasty or body lifts may take a bit longer. Be careful with your wounds and don't over-exert yourself.

Recovery after breast reduction, breast lift, breast augmentation and liposuction is four weeks. Recovery after most facial procedures such as face and neck lift, facial fat grafting, and rhinoplasty is four weeks. Eyelid surgery (blepharoplasty) recovery time is two to three weeks. Bruising and swelling may still be visible for some time. Obviously if you have a physically demanding occupation, you may require a longer recovery period.

Get moving early

It is important to get out of bed after the surgery. This must be done with the help of a nurse or physiotherapist while in hospital. You should sit out of bed, in a chair and take short walks to keep your circulation going. Walk with assistance. This is important as you may feel light-headed and could fall. If you have had an abdominoplasty you will need to walk bent slightly over for the first week or two, to avoid straining your wounds. Take deep breaths and cough to clear your chest, but support your wounds when you cough.

Going home after your plastic surgery

When going home it is important to have a friend, family member or caregiver with you to help during the recovery period.

Wound care basics

Wound care is simple - if you keep your wounds clean, they will heal. A general guideline to wound care is to clean your surgical wounds with baby shampoo or a mild antimicrobial wash, removing any clots or old blood on the wound edges. Pat dry and replace the dressings. Repeat daily. Remember to wash your hands before doing your dressings.

If you have wounds with secretions such as after liposuction, sanitary pads provide an excellent absorbent dressing that can be held in place with micropore tape, or under a post-surgical pressure garment. On clean and dry post-surgical wounds, flesh-coloured micropore tape can be applied to the wounds. These need only be replaced every two to three days, or when they peel off spontaneously. Getting the micropore tape wet when showering is not a problem, simply pat the micropore dry. The recommendation is taping for a three-month period after surgery to support wounds while they mature and grow stronger.

Prescription medication

Take your pain medication as prescribed to help ease any discomfort. You may experience nausea in the early post-operative period. It is important to take anti-nausea medication as prescribed to alleviate symptoms. If an antibiotic is prescribed post operatively, please use it as directed and complete the course. You should continue your regular chronic medication as prescribed, unless otherwise advised by your plastic surgeon.

Washing and showering

For the first two days after surgery you should not submerge wounds. Depending on the surgical procedure bed-washes may be required for the first few days. Thereafter you can take a shower, but with assistance.

Assistance is important when you shower, as you may feel light-headed when standing up in the shower. A shower chair may be handy for sitting in the shower. You can shampoo your hair. If you have had facial or scalp procedures, you will initially need assistance with washing your hair.

Eating and drinking

You can eat normally after surgery, but a liquid or soft diet is easier in the first days after surgery. A high protein diet will help with healing. Drink plenty of fluids to stay well hydrated. Constipation may be a problem. Short walks and drinking plenty of water will help, but medication can be used, if needed, to avoid straining.

Sleep

Getting a good night's rest is a must. Sleep is your body's way of recharging its batteries. After surgery you will be tired and in need of extra sleep due to the effects of general anaesthesia and to the stress of surgery itself. Have plenty of pillows handy to help you lie in a comfortable position.

But remember to take gentle walks to get your circulation going.

Cool compress

After eyelid, face or nasal surgery, gauze pads soaked in ice water will help with comfort and limit bruising and swelling. Put them on for fifteen minutes at a time, while you are awake. You can use your cold packs for 24-48 hours.

Smoking

It is very important to avoid smoking or secondary smoke six weeks before your surgery and during your recovery period. Smoking is proven to delay healing. Smoking is associated with an increased chance of complications after surgery including delayed wound healing, wound dehiscence (wound breakdown), poor scarring, infection, blood clots (venous thromboembolism) and breathing problems. Please avoid any nicotine-containing products - cigarettes, cigars, pipes and nicotine replacement therapy or e-cigarettes.

Swelling and tightness

You will feel swollen around the wounds after surgery. This is common especially after abdominoplasty, liposuction and rhinoplasty but swelling will subside in the recovery period. You will feel tightness around the wounds initially, and this will improve as your wounds heal. Walking may help with swelling by improving your circulation. Avoid salty food and don't take diuretic medication unless they have been specifically prescribed. A supportive (or compression) garment after body procedures may be used for comfort.

The “Day Three the Down-in-the-dumps Phenomenon”

Surgery places stress on the body and mind. Emotional stress is a real thing in the post-operative period. Often on the third day (or fourth day) after surgery your mood will be at an all-time low. You may feel down in the dumps. You may second guess your decision to undergo surgery; you may have feelings ranging from anger to guilt; you may even find yourself in tears just wanting to feel like your normal self again.

This can be a very difficult time for you and those close to you. Being prepared for the 'Day Three Down-in-the-dumps Phenomenon' is important. If it happens, you and your caregiver will realize that your response is normal and expected. The good news is this emotional hurdle does not last long and it soon becomes a distant memory. Please share any emotional stress or worries with a close friend.

Wound itchiness

Itching of the wounds is a rather common and very irritating occurrence after surgery. It may signify healing of nerve endings. A post-operative itch can be helped by applying a cold compress to the area, being in a cool environment, and making sure the wounds are clean. If very severe, antihistamine can be prescribed to alleviate the symptoms. Fortunately itchiness improves after two to three days.

Your scars

Every surgical incision will result in a scar. The ultimate quality of your scars depends on a number of factors including genetics, general health, smoking, scar care and the position of the scar. To minimise scar visibility once healed, surgical incisions are placed in natural transition areas of the face or body such as in a crease, behind the ears, or hidden under the bra line or a bikini line.

Sun avoidance and strict sunscreen use for six months after surgery will help to avoid darkening (hyper-pigmentation) of your scars. Scar therapy with massage, scar taping with micropore, and using silicone gel may have a beneficial effect on the ultimate appearance of your scars.

Follow up

We will support you throughout your recovery and keep a close eye on your progress. In the first week after your surgery we will see you for a wound check and a dressing change and at week two a second wound review is done. After that, further follow-up appointments will be scheduled as needed. It is important to see us for your appointments even if you are happy that all is well.

Please don't hesitate to contact us for any questions or concerns. We are always available help throughout your treatment.