

12 Things I Wish I Knew Before Tummy Tuck Surgery

By Kimmers25



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Kimbers25, a RealSelf user, wrote the article below as part of her [Tummy Tuck guide](#). Get answers from doctors, read reviews, find out local pricing and more at the [RealSelf Tummy Tuck page](#).

Real Facts

Data below derived from RealSelf Tummy Tuck user reviews at the time of publication. Click on the respective facts to learn more:

Avg. Cost reported by members

\$8,600

Worth it rating by members

89%

Total Reviews on RealSelf

913

1. It is going to take a long time to heal. I went in thinking I was going to be up and running in two weeks. What the heck.... I am an intelligent woman but this was really stupid thinking. Please plan on taking a minimum of two full weeks off work and three to four if you can swing it.
2. They tell you that you will have swelling...whoa. That is an understatement so hang tough.
3. Your clothes won't fit for a while so don't think you are jumping into a pair of skinny jeans any time soon. So not going to happen ladies. I guess I had visions of the tummy being removed, fat being sucked out of my hips and running out to a party the next week. Dreamer....
4. Do not...and I repeat do not weigh or measure yourself for the first 8 weeks. Your weight will most likely be up and you will be swollen and full of fluid for at least the first month. Well the swelling lasts for weeks so hang on tight.
5. Do not eat Mexican food the day before your surgery! Totally stupid idea on my part. I got to the hospital and while waiting to be taken back my IBS kicked in. Holy mother of God...I really didn't think I would stop pooping in time for the surgery. I had visions of being on the OR table, ready to be put under and screaming STOP. I need to go poop. LOL
6. Please let people take care of you and wait on you hand and foot.

Don't be a hero and try to run any marathons or be super woman. Yes ladies we all know we can run the show and manager everything and everyone in our life....but not now! Just surrender to your care takers and heal properly! Oh yes; and if the spouse is not doing things the way you would normally do it just let it go. You can straighten everything out later. Nobody will die if you are not running the ship for a while.

7. Eat a light diet the day before surgery; trust me on this one!
8. They tell you pre op that you will have some discomfort for a while after surgery. That is a lie because it hurts like hell. Obviously the people telling you this have never had a tummy tuck. As long as you don't laugh, cry, sneeze, take a deep breath, move, poop, try to push and pass gas or any other sudden movements you will be fine. Basically just lay in the bed and play dead for about a week and you will be fine.
9. Ok the pain meds do a number on your system. Constipation sets in quickly and hurts like hell. Make sure you take Milk of Magnesia the day after surgery; or some sort of stool softener. It hurt so bad that I felt like I had an army of little

men with swords in my belly. Miserable!!!! I was gripping the rails of my bed as if I was giving birth. This was the time I wished my IBS would kick in. All I wanted was a nice easy pooh.

10. Three to five hours after you take the MOM your tummy will start to rumble. Please be near a bathroom and start heading there right away. I was moving so slow after surgery that it took forever to get anywhere. Well when the rumbling started I laid in the bed thinking I had time....hmm. Really I swear I am an intelligent person. I couldn't run so this was going to be a challenge!
11. Make sure you have all the necessary supplies on hand before the surgery day. You won't be able to drive to get anything after. [See the supply guide.](#)
12. Do not watch any funny movies the first two weeks. I made that mistake and it hurt like hell. You do not want any deep gut laughter for a while. My son laughed so hard watching me try not to laugh. I thought he was going to wet his pants laughing. Apparently the face of a woman in pain after a tummy tuck is quite comical to a teenager. The little shit!

[Read the rest of Kimmers25's Tummy Tuck Guide](#)

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Let us help you find the right cosmetic treatment and doctor in your area, while learning from people like [Kimmers25](#) about what it's like to go through a procedure.

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Here is a list of links from this article:

- Kimmers25 <http://www.realself.com/user/89074>
 - Tummy Tuck Guide <http://www.realself.com/forum/tummy-tuck-survival-real-life-guide>
 - Supply Guide <http://www.realself.com/forum/supplies-after-tummy-tuck-surgery>
- Tummy Tuck
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12 Things I Want Patients to Know Before Tummy Tuck Surgery

By Dr. Elizabeth Lee

Dr. Elizabeth Lee, a board certified plastic surgeon, gives the doctors perspective on preparing for a Tummy Tuck

Healing well and getting the best result from a tummy tuck depends on a partnership developed between me as the surgeon and you as the patient. What I do in the operating room is only part of the ultimate outcome. You have to heal.

Healing requires a lot of attention to taking care of yourself, probably more than most women are in the habit of doing. For a majority of my women patients, this requires a fair amount of planning. So if there are twelve things I want a patient to know before surgery to plan for a smooth recovery it is these:

1. Plan enough time off

This is not simply time off work. You must also make arrangements for care of your children, for care of your home, for care of other family members for whom you may be responsible (husbands, elderly parents, etc.) Two weeks is the minimum before returning to a desk job. Working only ½ days the first week back to work is even better. You will not be able to do heavy physical work, work that involves travel or a lot of standing for three weeks.

2. Make sure you have enough help lined up

This probably means full time help with young children AND an adult to help you get in and out of bed, prepare food for you, help you dress for the first few days after the surgery. One additional adult in the house (you don't count) is only adequate in those first several days if your children are at an age where they can be left unsupervised at the drop of a hat for 5 minutes or so when the adult needs to be with you. By around the third day after surgery, you will be able to do more for yourself so that one adult (in addition to you) in the house is usually enough.

3. You should do little or nothing besides caring for yourself in the first 2 weeks

Even if you think you feel well enough to "do some work" you are not to try. This means no cooking, no answering emails (work related or personal), no child care, no laundry, no housework, no cleaning out that closet you have been

dying to organize. It is entirely too easy for many of my patients to focus on a task and not be aware of their body's needs. In the first week after surgery you need to pay careful attention to yourself so that you lie down as soon as you are tired and eat as soon as you are hungry. If you give yourself the space to answer your body's signals, you will find yourself suddenly overcome by the need to sleep or the need to eat and you should do just that.

By the second week, you will be feeling better, but certainly not back to yourself. You will probably be able to stand up straight and move around the house for several hours at a time. You will be able to spend time with your kids, but should not plan to be their full time caregiver. You will still feel suddenly exhausted or hungry and should have enough other help that you can excuse yourself and go lie down as soon as you feel the need.

I am aware as I give these instructions to my patients in the office that a glassy look often comes into their eyes as they think, "Oh, she has no idea how tough I am. I know that her other patients are all softies, but I delivered a baby and went right back to the rice paddies." Trust me on this, surgery is a big deal and your body is going to take what it needs. You CAN fight it and not plan adequately for it. Doing this is likely to prolong your feeling lousy and wiped out and possibly increase your risk of complications. You will recover better and faster if you accept you body's need for attention and rest, and plan adequately for it.

4. Expect to feel wiped out for six weeks

By the time you go back to a desk job at two weeks, you will feel OK focusing on your job. Any pain you still have should be managed by Ibuprofen. Expect though that when you get home from work you will be wiped out. You may find yourself needing to go to bed at 7:30 PM. Most of my patients are used to being active for several hours after everyone else in the house is asleep. For six weeks, you will not be able to do this. It is very common to have patients in for a postoperative visit around three weeks after the surgery, stressed out that they can't do what they are used

to doing and they don't feel like themselves. I remind them that they probably don't remember they have just had surgery because they are not in a lot of pain, but that they have three weeks more to go for this intense healing period. When you heal you need more sleep. Most patients are pretty consistent at telling me that the first day of week seven, their stamina is back and they feel like themselves. It can take longer if you don't allow yourself those six weeks sleeping more and accomplishing less than you are used to.

5. Nutrition is very important

In my area, a fair number of my smart, professional women patients don't sit down to eat regular meals. Many of us also diet constantly. Nutritional habits that may work to maintain you when you are healthy can become a huge stress when you have a surgical wound to heal. You have to eat well. You should have protein with every meal, at least two eggs or four egg whites, two pieces of citrus fruit per day (whole fruit, not juice) and then whatever else you want. It is not healthy to try to lose weight during this time. You must eat well to heal well.

6. Full healing takes up to a year

A majority of swelling, pain and postoperative fatigue resolves in the first six weeks. The healing process goes on for months after that. The scar which will initially be dark or red and bumpy under the skin will soften, flatten and fade. The skin on the belly will initially be numb. Sensation will return in fits and starts. Your abdominal wall will initially feel stiff and swollen, particularly the area below the belly button. This swelling will usually be worse in the evening and better in the morning, but the fluctuations will improve slowly over months. While improvement in your shape and appearance will be obvious within days after surgery, things will continue to change and improve over that first year.

7. The first three days after a tummy tuck are the worst

I do most of my tummy tucks as out patient surgery. The patients come in for the operation and go home to their own beds the same day. There are many reasons for this approach, not the least of which is that the hospital is not a great place for an otherwise healthy patient. Most patients come in to see me in the office the day after surgery and ask me how I could have let them do this to themselves. By the next morning, they start to feel better each day. By day three, there is light at the end of the tunnel and they are starting to be happy they have had the surgery.

8. Pain medication does not take the pain away, it makes it better

I typically prescribe some narcotic containing compound like Vicodin and Ibuprofen, to be taken in staggered doses around the clock. The majority of patients are off narcotic and only on Ibuprofen by several days post op, not because I won't renew the narcotic prescription, but because Ibuprofen is enough to bring the pain down to a comfortable level.

9. You will have surgical drains for seven to ten days

These require a bit of care, emptying them regularly and measuring the drainage. It is not hard to do and the nurses in the recovery room will teach you and your caregiver. All the "significant others" involved in the care of my patients have done this with no problem. I remove the drains in the office when the 24 hour total drainage is low enough. This is usually around day five for the first and two days later for the second. Taking them out is easy and fast, so don't worry. The biggest problem for most patients is that they cannot get these drains wet, so will not be able to shower or take a bath until both are out. Hair washing in the sink is ok as are sponge baths, but the drain sites must stay dry.

10. You will probably not be able to drive for ten days to two weeks

This varies from patient to patient, but an absolute requirement is that you be off all narcotic so you are driving sober. The second requirement is more of a judgment call on the part of the patient. The seatbelt lies right across the surgical site. You must feel well enough that this will not be a distraction from driving. An instant worrying about your belly may cause hesitation before slamming on the breaks. This half a second delay can be the difference between having or avoiding an accident. Most women drive by ten days, some sooner, some later.

11. You will need some time off from your exercise routine and heavy lifting

There is no cookbook to follow for when you will be able to get back to exercising. Most patients are not even ready to think about it for at least a month. Postoperative patients usually know when they are ready to start working out again. My advice is always that you start with 1/10th of what you usually do, then stop and take an inventory. If the activity has caused discomfort that does not resolve within 10 minutes of rest, you probably over did it. If you feel fine, double the exercise the next day and take inventory again. Build up slowly and don't push. You will probably not be doing any abdominal workouts for two months.

12. Choose the right surgeon for you

This relates back to my introductory paragraph, and is not the least significant of recommendations just because it is the last. Your eventual outcome is a team effort. You must feel comfortable with your surgeon. You will need to see a lot of

him or her during your recovery. Postoperative visits are usually frequent in the first two weeks and less as time goes on. Questions and concerns will arise, and you should feel able to get in touch with your surgeon's office and have these issues addressed. In my opinion, no question is too silly or stupid. It actually is better for me to see a patient and find that what they were concerned about is not a problem than to see them and discover that there really is a complication. Pay attention to how you feel speaking with your surgeon before surgery. Communication will probably not get easier after the procedure when you don't feel well and are anxious that something may not be healing normally.

Tummy tucks should be done by surgeons certified by The American Board of Plastic Surgery. While other surgeons may have expertise in surgery of the face, only those Boarded by the American Board of Plastic Surgery have received proper training in surgery of the body and the face.

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