



Tummy Tuck (Abdominoplasty) Recovery Guide

Day-by-Day Timeline, Supplies, and Realistic Milestones

Are you thinking about a **tummy tuck** or counting down to surgery day? This guide lays out a clear recovery plan: what to expect each day, what to buy, how to sleep, and when you can drive, work out, or fly. We'll also flag red-alert symptoms so you know exactly when to call your surgeon.

Typical Timeline (Full Tummy Tuck)

Timeframe	What most patients can do
Day 0-2	Walk short distances at home, bent slightly at the waist; sleep on back with pillows under knees; start stool softener; wear compression 24/7; manage drains per instructions.
Days 3-7	Light meals, multiple short walks; shower if cleared; keep compression on; no lifting >10 lb; no driving while on narcotics.
Week 2	Desk work for many patients (remote or in-office with frequent movement breaks); continue compression; drains may come out when outputs meet targets.
Weeks 3-4	Energy improves; transition off daytime compression if advised; start gentle standing tall; no core work yet.
Weeks 5-6	Light cardio and lower-body training has been cleared; many resume normal driving and most jobs; travel is often okay after surgeon clearance.
Months 3-6	Swelling continues to settle; scars mature; gradual return to full workouts including core with guidance.

Mini tummy tuck?

Expect a shorter arc (often 1–2 weeks faster) with similar rules. For a combined mommy makeover, plan on a slower pace and more help at home. See the cost and safety measurement of mommy makeover surgery for staging vs. bundling.

Your Recovery Setup (Before Surgery)

Must-have supplies

- Front-closing, high-waist compression garment (backup set helps)
- Abdominal binder if your surgeon prefers it over garments
- Gauze, non-stick pads, paper tape, and silicone gel/sheets (for later)
- Shower chair and handheld shower head (safer first week)
- Wedge pillow or recliner; extra bed pillows for knee support
- Stool softener + gentle laxative on hand (constipation is common)
- Thermometer, pill organizer, water bottle, and light snacks
- Loose zip-front clothing; slip-on shoes
- If you'll have drains: drain lanyard or belt for showers

Home and help

- Line up a trusted adult for the first 72 hours (longer if you have young kids or stairs).
- Pet and childcare support for 2 weeks if your children need lifting.
- Place essentials at waist height—no reaching or bending early on.

Day-by-Day Recovery Plan (What to Expect and Do)

Days 0–2: Protect, prevent, and walk (a little)

- **Pain & meds:** You'll feel tightness and pressure, especially if you had muscle repair (rectus plication). Take meds on schedule. Stay ahead of pain—don't "tough it out."
- **Positioning:** Sleep on your back with knees bent. A recliner or pillow "nest" helps you stay slightly flexed at the hips to reduce incision strain.
- **Walking:** Short, frequent hallway walks lower blood clot risk. You'll walk slightly bent; that's normal.
- **Compression:** Wear it 24/7 unless your surgeon says otherwise. Smooth wrinkles to avoid pressure marks.

- **Hydration & bowels:** Start stool softener day 0. Aim for water + fiber; add magnesium or a gentle laxative if you haven't had a bowel movement by day 2.
- **Drains:** Strip and record outputs exactly as taught.

⚠ **Call urgently** for one-sided calf pain, sudden shortness of breath, fever >101°F, rapidly growing tightness on one side of the abdomen, or foul drainage.

Days 3–7: Gentle routine, careful hygiene

- **Shower** once cleared. Use lukewarm water, pat dry, no soaking.
- **Incision care:** Follow your exact protocol (ointment vs. dry dressings). Keep tape flat. No lotions on fresh incisions.
- **Activity:** Add more short walks; avoid pushing, pulling, vacuuming, or lifting >10 lb. Still no core work or stretching the abdomen.
- **Work:** Some remote/desk work is possible by day 5–7 with movement breaks every hour.
- **Driving:** Only when you're off narcotics, feel steady, and can brake hard without pain.

Week 2: Turning the corner

- **Drains** often come out this week once outputs are low and consistent.
- **Compression** continues (often 24/7) unless your surgeon changes the plan.
- **Energy** improves, but swelling and tightness can fluctuate. This "good day/bad day" rhythm is normal.
- **Work:** Most desk jobs resume; active jobs usually wait longer.
- **Scar care:** Once the incision seals, many surgeons start silicone gel/sheets for 8–12+ weeks. Sun protection is non-negotiable.

Weeks 3–4: Mobility and posture

- **Posture:** Start standing taller; don't force straight posture if it pulls on the scar. Gentle progress wins.
- **Cardio:** Many return to light cardio (walking, stationary bike) after clearance. No running or core work yet.
- **Compression:** Some taper to daytime only by week 4; others stay 24/7 to tame swelling. Follow your surgeon's preference.
- **Scar care:** Keep silicone going; add gentle scar massage only if your surgeon approves.

Weeks 5–6: Back to life—with limits

- **Exercise:** Gradual cardio and light lower-body resistance as cleared. Most still avoid planks, crunches, or heavy lifts.
- **Travel:** Short flights are often fine at week 4–6 with compression stockings, aisle walks, and hydration. Long flights need a green light from your surgeon.
- **Work:** Many return fully, including jobs with moderate activity.

Months 2–6: Refinement and long-term care

- Core training resumes in phases. Expect a stronger, more supported feeling as the repair heals.
- Swelling fades slowly; mornings look flatter than nights for months.
- Scars shift from pink to lighter tones over 6–12+ months. Keep using silicone and SPF.

Pain, Tightness, and Numbness—What's Normal?

- **Tightness** is expected and often peaks at 1–2 weeks; it eases as swelling drops.
- **Numbness** around the lower abdomen and near the belly button can last months; nerves wake up slowly (you might feel tingles/itch as they do).
- **Soreness after sitting** is common—set a timer to stand and walk every hour.

For a deeper dive into comfort strategies, see [how painful a tummy tuck is](#).

Activity Rules (Lifting, Core, Sex, and Saunas)

- **Lifting:** <10 lb for 2 weeks; <20–25 lb until week 4–6 or cleared.
- **Core:** No planks/crunches until your surgeon okays it (often 6–8+ weeks).
- **Sex:** When you're off pain meds, mobile, and not straining the incision—often after 2–3 weeks, but be gentle and avoid pressure across the abdomen.
- **Pools/Hot tubs/Saunas:** Only after incisions are sealed and your surgeon gives the go-ahead (often 4–6+ weeks). Heat worsens swelling early.

Eating, Drinking, and Meds

- **Hydration + protein** support healing. Think lean protein, soft veggies, fruit, whole grains.
- **Salt** makes swelling worse. Keep it modest.
- **Alcohol & nicotine** delay healing. Avoid nicotine entirely for *4–6 weeks* and follow your surgeon's alcohol guidance (often no alcohol while on pain meds and antibiotics).
- **NSAIDs** (ibuprofen, etc.) depend on your bleeding-risk plan. Use only if/when your surgeon approves.

Compression

Compression helps manage swelling, supports muscle repair, and smooths the contour. The fit should be snug, not painful. Smooth out folds.

If you see dents or new sharp swelling above/below the garment edge, show your team, sometimes you need a different size or style as swelling changes.

Drains (Quick Care Notes)

- **Milking/stripping** keeps tubes clear; do it as taught.
- **Record outputs** daily. Removal often happens when outputs stay under your surgeon's cutoff for 24–48 hours.
- **Watch** for sudden increased output, bright red blood, clogs you can't clear, or foul odor—call promptly.

Red Flags: Call the Office If You Notice...

- Fever >101°F, chills, or spreading redness at the incision
- Sudden, painful bulge on one side of the abdomen (possible hematoma/seroma)
- Shortness of breath, chest pain, or one-sided calf pain (possible clot)
- Foul drainage, skin darkening, or opening of the incision
- Severe constipation (no BM by day 4) despite softeners and hydration

We'll give you a same-day contact plan. Never wait on these.

Return to Work

- **Remote/desk work:** many return by week 1–2
- **On-your-feet jobs (retail, teaching):** 2–3+ weeks
- **Manual labor:** 4–6+ weeks with staged return

Plan staggered hours the first week back. Pack your compression, water, and small snacks.

Scars: Set Expectations and Protect Your Results

- Incisions sit low to hide under underwear/swimsuits.
- Early scars look pink and feel firm; they soften and fade over 6–12+ months.
- Silicone gel/sheets + SPF are your best long-term tools.
- If you tend to make keloids/hypertrophic scars, tell your surgeon up front. We'll layer strategies (pressure, steroid injections, laser at the right time).

Lymphatic Massage—Yes or No?

Many patients ask about post-op lymphatic drainage. It can help some people with stubborn swelling, but only:

- After your surgeon clears the timing,
- With a provider trained in post-surgical care,
- Avoiding any aggressive pressure on repairs or incisions.

Ask us if and when it's right for you.

Cost, Time Off, and Smarter Payments

Budget for time away from work and a few add-ons (extra garments, childcare, travel pillows). If monthly payments help you move forward:

- Read our [finance guide to cosmetic surgery](#) for a clear matrix of options and promo-APR traps.
- If you're still choosing among clinics, see [how to choose the best cosmetic surgeon](#) to vet credentials, anesthesia safety, and facility standards.

Quick Answers to Questions You May Have

How long does swelling last?

Most swelling improves in the first 6–8 weeks, then tapers for several months. A little evening puffiness can linger up to 6 months.

Can I combine lipo with my tummy tuck?

Often, yes, especially flanks or waist. Combo cases can add swelling and lengthen recovery a bit. We'll map the trade-offs during your consultation.

When can I wear normal jeans again?

Most people return to regular waistbands by week 4–6, but high-rise soft leggings feel better sooner.

Will I lose sensation around my belly button?

Temporary numb patches are common. Sensation usually improves over months as nerves heal.

See [how long it takes to recover from a tummy tuck](#) for deeper expectations. If pain control is a concern, read [how painful a tummy tuck is](#) and bring your questions.

Ready to plan?

We'll customize timelines, work-return letters, and compression protocols to your body and your job.



vip@bgmgcosmetics.com

+1 (562) 928-7060

7916 Eastern Ave. Bell Gardens, CA 90201