

# Informed Consent for Body Contouring Procedures in the Massive Weight Loss Patient

The panel members discussed the issue of informed consent at length. As with any patient, education and communication are vital to ensure that there is adequate understanding of the risks and benefits of surgery (Figs. 1 and 2). As a group, massive weight loss patients are generally very educated, and the surgeon must be sure that each patient fully understands the potential risks and downsides of surgery. All agree it is critical that the patient understand that body contouring surgery after massive weight loss is a process rather than a one-time event. Table 1 lists some of the key points discussed by panel members.

It is prudent to ensure that family members and support people are also fully informed as to the risks of surgery. Several panel members incorporate the use of an album of photographs showing patients who have undergone successful body contouring procedures. It is important to show realistic results rather than your best outcomes. Some surgeons also include photographs of common complications. It is helpful for patients to see the improvement in scars over time as well as successful outcomes that other patients have experienced. In addition, patients should have a clear understanding of the surgeon's revision policy. They must understand that, to some degree, relapse is expected. Secondary procedures in the massive weight loss population are common, and the surgeon must carefully clarify the difference between a secondary procedure (i.e., skin tightening) and a revision. Several panel members periodically attend patient

support group meetings and find this to be another important avenue for educating potential patients about the body contouring process. Many of those issues are specifically addressed later in this supplement.

The American Society of Plastic Surgeons has developed informed consent documents for a number of body contouring procedures specific to massive weight loss patients. Copies of the society's informed consent documents for both body lift and medial thigh lift surgery follow. These documents are reprinted with the permission of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons. Additional information can be found at [www.plasticsurgery.org](http://www.plasticsurgery.org).

**Table 1.** Key Points for Review with the Massive Weight Loss Patient

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- Insurance: what may be covered, what is not
  - Length of body contouring procedures
  - Need for multiple/staged procedures to achieve optimal result
    - Impact of different procedures on adjacent areas
    - Ability to go back and revise as needed
  - Increased risk in smokers
  - Scars
    - Placement
    - Migration
    - Contracture
    - Asymmetry
  - Recurrent skin laxity
  - Potential for sensory motor loss, especially in the arms
  - Inability to close the wound
  - Risk of deep vein thrombosis/pulmonary embolism
  - Potential for:
    - Dehiscences
    - Seromas
    - Lymphocele/lymphedema
  - Importance of weight maintenance
  - Possibility of:
    - Sexual dysfunction in women
    - Vulvar distortion
  - Clearly define your revision policy
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# INFORMED CONSENT – BODY LIFT SURGERY

## CONSENT FOR SURGERY / PROCEDURE or TREATMENT

1. I hereby authorize Dr. \_\_\_\_\_ and such assistants as may be selected to perform the following procedure or treatment:

**BODY LIFT** (Circumferential abdominoplasty, lower body lift, belt lipectomy, circumferential lipectomy, or torsoplasty)

I have received the following information sheet:

### INFORMED CONSENT - BODY LIFT SURGERY

2. I recognize that during the course of the operation and medical treatment or anesthesia, unforeseen conditions may necessitate different procedures than those above. I therefore authorize the above physician and assistants or designees to perform such other procedures that are in the exercise of his or her professional judgment necessary and desirable. The authority granted under this paragraph shall include all conditions that require treatment and are not known to my physician at the time the procedure is begun.
3. I consent to the administration of such anesthetics considered necessary or advisable. I understand that all forms of anesthesia involve risk and the possibility of complications, injury, and sometimes death.
4. I acknowledge that no guarantee or representation has been given by anyone as to the results that may be obtained.
5. I consent to be photographed or televised before, during, and after the operation(s) or procedure(s) to be performed, including appropriate portions of my body, for medical, scientific or educational purposes, provided my identity is not revealed by the pictures.
6. For purposes of advancing medical education, I consent to the admittance of observers to the operating room.
7. I consent to the disposal of any tissue, medical devices or body parts which may be removed.
8. I consent to the utilization of blood products should they be deemed necessary by my surgeon and/or his/her appointees, and I am aware that there are potential significant risks to my health with their utilization.
9. I authorize the release of my Social Security number to appropriate agencies for legal reporting and medical-device registration, if applicable.
10. I understand that the surgeons' fees are separate from the anesthesia and hospital charges, and the fees are agreeable to me. If a secondary procedure is necessary, further expenditure will be required.
11. I realize that not having the operation is an option.
12. IT HAS BEEN EXPLAINED TO ME IN A WAY THAT I UNDERSTAND:
  - a. THE ABOVE TREATMENT OR PROCEDURE TO BE UNDERTAKEN
  - b. THERE MAY BE ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES OR METHODS OF TREATMENT
  - c. THERE ARE RISKS TO THE PROCEDURE OR TREATMENT PROPOSED

I CONSENT TO THE TREATMENT OR PROCEDURE AND THE ABOVE LISTED ITEMS (1-12). I AM SATISFIED WITH THE EXPLANATION.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Patient or Person Authorized to Sign for Patient

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Witness \_\_\_\_\_

## INFORMED CONSENT – BODY LIFT SURGERY

### **HEALTH INSURANCE**

Most health insurance companies exclude coverage for cosmetic surgical operations such as body lift surgery or any complications that might occur from surgery. Please carefully review your health insurance subscriber-information pamphlet or contact your insurance company for a detailed explanation of their policies for covering body lift procedures. **Most insurance plans exclude coverage for secondary or revisionary surgery.**

### **FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES**

The cost of surgery involves several charges for the services provided. The total includes fees charged by your surgeon, the cost of surgical supplies, anesthesia, laboratory tests, and possible outpatient hospital charges, depending on where the surgery is performed. Depending on whether the cost of surgery is covered by an insurance plan, you will be responsible for necessary co-payments, deductibles, and charges not covered. The fees charged for this procedure do not include any potential future costs for additional procedures that you elect to have or require in order to revise, optimize, or complete your outcome. Additional costs may occur should complications develop from the surgery. Secondary surgery or hospital day-surgery charges involved with revision surgery will also be your responsibility. **In signing the consent for this surgery/procedure, you acknowledge that you have been informed about its risk and consequences and accept responsibility for the clinical decisions that were made along with the financial costs of all future treatments.**

### **DISCLAIMER**

Informed-consent documents are used to communicate information about the proposed surgical treatment of a disease or condition along with disclosure of risks and alternative forms of treatment(s), including no surgery. The informed-consent process attempts to define principles of risk disclosure that should generally meet the needs of most patients in most circumstances.

However, informed-consent documents should not be considered all-inclusive in defining other methods of care and risks encountered. Your plastic surgeon may provide you with additional or different information which is based on all the facts in your particular case and the current state of medical knowledge.

Informed-consent documents are not intended to define or serve as the standard of medical care. Standards of medical care are determined on the basis of all of the facts involved in an individual case and are subject to change as scientific knowledge and technology advance and as practice patterns evolve.

**It is important that you read the above information carefully and have all of your questions answered before signing the consent on the next page.**

## INFORMED CONSENT – BODY LIFT SURGERY

It is important to refrain from smoking at least 6 weeks before surgery and until your physician states it is safe to return, if desired.

**Post-bariatric patients-** It is highly recommended that you quit smoking before undergoing this procedure as it will adversely affect your outcome. Only under certain circumstances, clearly specified by your plastic surgeon, should this procedure be done on an individual who smokes.

**Long-Term Results-** Subsequent alterations in the appearance of your body may occur as the result of aging, sun exposure, weight loss, weight gain, pregnancy, menopause or other circumstances not related to your surgery.

**Female Patient Information-** It is important to inform your plastic surgeon if you use birth control pills, estrogen replacement, or if you believe you may be pregnant. Many medications including antibiotics may neutralize the preventive effect of birth control pills, allowing for conception and pregnancy.

**Intimate Relations After Surgery-** Surgery involves coagulating of blood vessels and increased activity of any kind may open these vessels leading to a bleed, or hematoma. Activity that increases your pulse or heart rate may cause additional bruising, swelling, and the need for return to surgery and control bleeding. It is wise to refrain from sexual activity until your physician states it is safe.

**Mental Health Disorders and Elective Surgery-** It is important that all patients seeking to undergo elective surgery have realistic expectations that focus on improvement rather than perfection. Complications or less than satisfactory results are sometimes unavoidable, may require additional surgery and often are stressful. Please openly discuss with your surgeon, prior to surgery, any history that you may have of significant emotional depression or mental health disorders. Although many individuals may benefit psychologically from the results of elective surgery, effects on mental health cannot be accurately predicted.

**Medications-** There are many adverse reactions that occur as the result of taking over-the-counter, herbal, and/or prescription medications. Be sure to check with your physician about any drug interactions that may exist with medications which you are already taking. If you have an adverse reaction, stop the drugs immediately and call your plastic surgeon for further instructions. If the reaction is severe, go immediately to the nearest emergency room. When taking the prescribed pain medications after surgery, realize that they can affect your thought process. Do not drive, do not operate complex equipment, do not make any important decisions and do not drink any alcohol while taking these medications. Be sure to take your prescribed medication only as directed.

## ADDITIONAL SURGERY NECESSARY

Should complications occur, additional surgery or other treatments may be necessary. Secondary surgery may be necessary to obtain optimal results. Even though risks and complications occur infrequently, the risks cited are particularly associated with a body lift. Other complications and risks can occur but are even more uncommon. The practice of medicine and surgery is not an exact science. Although good results are expected, there is no guarantee or warranty expressed or implied, on the results that may be obtained. With body lift surgery, it may not be possible to achieve optimal results with a single surgical procedure. This may require multiple surgical sessions to produce a final outcome.

## PATIENT COMPLIANCE

Follow all physician instructions carefully; this is essential for the success of your outcome. It is important that the surgical incisions are not subjected to excessive force, swelling, abrasion, or motion during the time of healing. Personal and vocational activity needs to be restricted. Protective dressings and drains should not be removed unless instructed by your plastic surgeon. Successful post-operative function depends on both surgery and subsequent care. Physical activity that increases your pulse or heart rate may cause bruising, swelling, fluid accumulation and the need for return to surgery. It is wise to refrain from intimate physical activities after surgery until your physician states it is safe. It is important that you participate in follow-up care, return for aftercare, and promote your recovery after surgery.

## INFORMED CONSENT – BODY LIFT SURGERY

**Shock-** In rare circumstances, your surgical procedure can cause severe trauma, particularly when multiple or extensive procedures are performed. Although serious complications are infrequent, infections or excessive fluid loss can lead to severe illness and even death. If surgical shock occurs, hospitalization and additional treatment would be necessary.

**Surgical Wetting Solutions-** There is the possibility that large volumes of fluid containing dilute local anesthetic drugs and epinephrine that is injected into fatty deposits during surgery may contribute to fluid overload or systemic reaction to these medications. Additional treatment including hospitalization may be necessary.

**Persistent Swelling (Lymphedema)-** Persistent swelling in the legs can occur following body lift surgery.

**Pain-** You will experience pain after your surgery. Pain of varying intensity and duration may occur and persist after body lift surgery. Chronic pain may occur very infrequently from nerves becoming trapped in scar tissue after a body lift.

**Unsatisfactory Result-** Although good results are expected, there is no guarantee or warranty expressed or implied, on the results that may be obtained. You may be disappointed with the results of body lift surgery. This would include risks such as asymmetry, unsatisfactory or highly visible surgical scar location, unacceptable visible deformities, bunching and rippling in the skin near the suture lines or at the ends of the incisions (dog ears), poor healing, wound disruption, and loss of sensation. It may not be possible to correct or improve the effects of surgical scars. Additional surgery may be required to improve results.

**Deep Venous Thrombosis, Cardiac and Pulmonary Complications-** Surgery, especially longer procedures, may be associated with the formation of, or increase in, blood clots in the venous system. Pulmonary complications may occur secondarily to both blood clots (pulmonary emboli), fat deposits (fat emboli) or partial collapse of the lungs after general anesthesia. Pulmonary and fat emboli can be life-threatening or fatal in some circumstances. Inactivity and other conditions may increase the incidence of blood clots traveling to the lungs causing a major blood clot that may result in death. It is important to discuss with your physician any past history of blood clots, swollen legs or the use of estrogen or birth control pills that may contribute to this condition. Cardiac complications are a risk with any surgery and anesthesia, even in patients without symptoms. If you experience shortness of breath, chest pains, or unusual heart beats, seek medical attention immediately. Should any of these complications occur, you may require hospitalization and additional treatment.

## ADDITIONAL ADVISORIES

**Metabolic Status of Massive Weight Loss Patients-** Your personal metabolic status of blood chemistry and protein levels may be abnormal following massive weight loss and surgical procedures to make a patient loose weight. Individuals with abnormalities may be a risk for serious medical and surgical complications, including delayed wound healing, infection or even in rare cases, death.

### **Smoking, Second-Hand Smoke Exposure, Nicotine Products (Patch, Gum, Nasal Spray):**

Patients who are currently smoking, use tobacco products, or nicotine products (patch, gum, or nasal spray) are at a greater risk for significant surgical complications of skin dying, delayed healing, and additional scarring. Individuals exposed to second-hand smoke are also at potential risk for similar complications attributable to nicotine exposure. Additionally, smoking may have a significant negative effect on anesthesia and recovery from anesthesia, with coughing and possibly increased bleeding. Individuals who are not exposed to tobacco smoke or nicotine-containing products have a significantly lower risk of this type of complication. Please indicate your current status regarding these items below:

\_\_\_\_\_ I am a non-smoker and do not use nicotine products. I understand the risk of second-hand smoke exposure causing surgical complications.

\_\_\_\_\_ I am a smoker or use tobacco / nicotine products. I understand the risk of surgical complications due to smoking or use of nicotine products.



## INFORMED CONSENT – BODY LIFT SURGERY

**Skin Discoloration / Swelling-** Bruising and swelling normally occurs following a body lift. The skin in or near the surgical site can appear either lighter or darker than surrounding skin. Although uncommon, swelling and skin discoloration may persist for long periods of time and, in rare situations, may be permanent.

**Skin Sensitivity-** Itching, tenderness, or exaggerated responses to hot or cold temperatures may occur after surgery. Usually this resolve during healing, but in rare situations it may be chronic.

**Sutures-** Most surgical techniques use deep sutures. You may notice these sutures after your surgery. Sutures may spontaneously poke through the skin, become visible or produce irritation that requires removal.

**Fat Necrosis-** Fatty tissue found deep in the skin might die. This may produce areas of firmness within the skin. Additional surgery to remove areas of fat necrosis may be necessary. There is the possibility of contour irregularities in the skin that may result from fat necrosis.

**Damage to Deeper Structures-** There is the potential for injury to deeper structures including, nerves, blood vessels, muscles, and lungs (pneumothorax) during any surgical procedure. The potential for this to occur varies according to the type of procedure being performed. Injury to deeper structures may be temporary or permanent.

**Pubic Distortion-** It is possible, though unusual, for women to develop distortion of their labia and pubic area. Should this occur, additional treatment including surgery may be necessary.

**Scarring-** All surgery leaves scars, some more visible than others. Although good wound healing after a surgical procedure is expected, abnormal scars may occur within the skin and deeper tissues. Scars may be unattractive and of different color than surrounding skin. Scar appearance may also vary within the same scar, exhibit contour variations and "bunching" due to the amount of excess skin. Scars may be asymmetrical (appear different between right and left side of the body). There is the possibility of visible marks in the skin from sutures. In some cases scars may require surgical revision or treatment.

**Surgical Anesthesia-** Both local and general anesthesia involve risk. There is the possibility of complications, injury, and even death from all forms of surgical anesthesia or sedation.

**Asymmetry-** Symmetrical body appearance may not result from a body lift. Factors such as skin tone, fatty deposits, skeletal prominence, and muscle tone may contribute to normal asymmetry in body features. Most patients have differences between the right and left side of their body before any surgery is performed. Additional surgery may be necessary to attempt to improve asymmetry.

**Delayed Healing-** Wound disruption or delayed wound healing is possible. Some areas of the abdomen, flank, back, or buttocks may not heal normally and may take a long time to heal. Some areas of skin may die. This may require frequent dressing changes or further surgery to remove the non-healed tissue.  
**Smokers have a greater risk of skin loss and wound healing complications.**

**Allergic Reactions-** In rare cases, local allergies to tape, suture material and glues, blood products, topical preparations or injected agents have been reported. Serious systemic reactions including shock (anaphylaxis) may occur to drugs used during surgery and prescription medications. Allergic reactions may require additional treatment.

**Seroma-** Fluid accumulations frequently occur in between the skin and the abdominal wall, legs, flank, back, or buttocks. This may require additional procedures for drainage of fluid.

**Umbilicus-** Malposition, scarring, unacceptable appearance or loss of the umbilicus (navel) may occur.

## INFORMED CONSENT – BODY LIFT SURGERY

### **INSTRUCTIONS**

This is an informed-consent document that has been prepared to help inform you concerning body lift surgery (also commonly called lower body lift, belt lipectomy, circumferential lipectomy, or torsoplasty), its risks, as well as alternative treatment(s).

It is important that you read this information carefully and completely. Please initial each page, indicating that you have read the page and sign the consent for surgery as proposed by your plastic surgeon and agreed upon by you.

### **GENERAL INFORMATION**

A body lift is a surgical procedure to remove excess skin and fatty tissue from the middle and lower abdomen, hips, outer thighs, back, buttocks, and to tighten muscles of the abdominal wall. A body lift is not a surgical treatment for being overweight. Obese individuals who intend to lose weight should postpone all forms of body contouring surgery until they have reached a stable weight.

There are a variety of different techniques used by plastic surgeons for a body lift. A body lift can be combined with other forms of body-contouring surgery, including suction-assisted lipectomy, or performed at the same time with other elective surgeries.

### **ALTERNATIVE TREATMENTS**

Alternative forms of management consist of not treating the areas of loose skin and fatty deposits. Liposuction may be a surgical alternative to a body lift if there is good skin tone and localized abdominal fatty deposits in an individual of normal weight. Diet and exercise programs may be of benefit in the overall reduction of excess body fat and contour improvement. Risks and potential complications are also associated with alternative surgical forms of treatment.

### **RISKS OF BODY LIFT SURGERY**

Every surgical procedure involves a certain amount of risk and it is important that you understand these risks and the possible complications associated with them. In addition, every procedure has limitations. An individual's choice to undergo a surgical procedure is based on the comparison of the risk to potential benefit. Although the majority of patients do not experience these complications, you should discuss each of them with your plastic surgeon to make sure you completely understand all possible consequences of a body lift.

**Bleeding:** It is possible, though unusual, to experience a bleeding episode during or after surgery. Intraoperative blood transfusions may be required. Should post-operative bleeding occur, it may require an emergency treatment to drain the accumulated blood or blood transfusion. Do not take any aspirin or anti-inflammatory medications for ten days before surgery, as this may increase the risk of bleeding. Non-prescription "herbs" and dietary supplements can increase the risk of surgical bleeding. Hematoma can occur at any time following injury. If blood transfusions are needed to treat blood loss, there is a risk of blood-related infections such as hepatitis and HIV (AIDS). Heparin medications that are used to prevent blood clots in veins can produce bleeding and decreased blood platelets.

**Infection:** Infection is unusual after surgery. Should an infection occur, additional treatment including antibiotics, hospitalization, or additional surgery may be necessary.

**Change in Skin Sensation:** It is common to experience diminished (or loss) of skin sensation in areas that have had surgery. Diminished (or complete loss of skin sensation) may not totally resolve after a body lift.

**Skin Contour Irregularities:** Contour and shape irregularities and depressions may occur after a body lift. Visible and palpable wrinkling of skin can occur. Residual skin irregularities at the ends of the incisions or "dog ears" are always a possibility as is skin pitting when there is excessive redundant skin. This may improve with time, or it can be surgically corrected.

**Major Wound Separation:** Wounds may separate after surgery. Should this occur, additional treatment including surgery may be necessary.