

# The Smooth Tuck Procedure

AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH  
TO ABDOMINAL CONTOURING  
FOR THE OVERWEIGHT PATIENT

By Matthew R. Schulman, M.D.

**B**ody fat on an adult tends to increase gradually over the years. After the age of 30, an individual often gains fat according to a genetically predetermined pattern. For example, the abdomen, hips, and the area under the chin are places where fat begins to accumulate in adults. Fat in these areas is often resistant to diet or exercise. The hormonal changes that accompany pregnancy often make fat

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accumulate on the hips and abdomen that is particularly resistant to diet and exercise. People often turn to cosmetic surgery when the extra fat in their belly never seems to go away and when

endless exercise fails to tighten hanging skin. Tummy tucks have been the standard of treatment for those wanting a tighter tummy, yet they are quite invasive, require a prolonged recovery and are designed only for those people with loose skin of the abdomen and no excess fat.

## PATIENT SELECTION

In my practice, I was commonly seeing men and women who were slightly obese, specifically carrying the extra weight in the abdomen and flanks. Because a tummy tuck is primarily a muscle-tightening and skin-removing operation, the majority of people coming to my office were not ideal candidates. Performing a tummy tuck in the obese individual can result in significant post-operative complications. Also, because significant liposuction of the upper abdomen is not performed during a tummy tuck (because of potentially serious complications), the abdomen would still have significant fat after surgery, making the cosmetic

results less than ideal in the obese patient. Historically, the obese individual was given two options for flattening the abdomen: lose significant weight and then return for a traditional tummy tuck or undergo a staged procedure with aggressive liposuction of the abdomen, followed by excess skin

I wanted to offer men and women with excess abdominal fat and hanging skin an effective and safe option for a flatter abdomen. The Smooth Tuck procedure combines aggressive liposuction of the abdomen and flanks with excess skin removal into one operation.

other areas of the body. Next, a low, bikini incision is made, similar to the one used in a tummy tuck. The length of the incision will vary with each individual, depending on the extent of excess skin. The excess skin is removed, with or without repositioning of the belly button. Several layers of dissolvable sutures are placed to help ensure proper healing and good scar formation. I do place one drain which drains excess fluid and helps to decrease post-operative swelling. The drain typically remains for five to seven days.

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*– Dr. Schulman*

removal nine to twelve months later. While weight loss would be ideal, it is not realistic in many individuals who have been struggling with their weight for many years. The second option subjects the individual to the risks associated with two surgeries and two recoveries, not to mention the added financial cost.

### THE SMOOTH TUCK PROCEDURE

The Smooth Tuck takes approximately 90 minutes under general anesthesia. Aggressive tumescent liposuction is performed on the upper and lower abdomen and flanks. If the patient requests, additional liposuction can be performed on

### POST PROCEDURE

Smooth Tuck patients can return home the same day and resume their normal activities within five days. They may return to exercising and heavy lifting in 21 days. While my patients appreciate the improvement in abdominal contour immediately, I inform them that as the swelling continues to decrease over the



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next several weeks and months, the shape and contour of the abdomen will continue to improve. They are encouraged to wear a compression garment to help speed resolution of edema.

Smooth Tuck offers several advantages over a traditional tummy tuck. First, it offers the obese or slightly overweight individual an option for improving his or her abdominal shape. Most of my Smooth Tuck patients have already seen other surgeons and had been turned down for a tummy tuck. They are appreciative of this new surgical option and have very realistic expectations.

My patients understand that this procedure will not give them the tight, flat, thin abdomen they had when they were 16 years old. Several times a day I am told by a patient in consultation, “Doctor, I am not looking to be in any swimsuit competition.”

They are often very surprised that the improvement is much more dramatic than they had hoped for and many do find themselves back in a bathing suit for the first time in years.

Another advantage is that the amount of fat removed through liposuction is three to four times the amount removed during a tummy tuck. During a

skin of the abdomen and possibly death of the skin (necrosis), a deforming and potentially fatal complication.

In order to avoid these complications, liposuction is generally limited to the sides, or flanks, with an average of 600ml of fat removed. Because the critical blood supply to the skin of the abdomen is preserved during

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tummy tuck, exposure of the abdominal muscles is necessary to allow repair. This naturally disrupts some blood supply to the skin of the abdominal wall. Aggressive liposuction in this situation can cause decreased blood supply (ischemia) to the

a Smooth Tuck, I am able to safely remove an average of 2.5 liters of fat, or four times as much fat as during a tummy tuck.

Despite the increased amount of liposuction, the operating time for Smooth Tuck is about 30 minutes less than a



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traditional tummy tuck. This represents another potential advantage for the individual concerned about the length of time under anesthesia.

The recovery from a Smooth Tuck is significantly shorter and less painful than a tummy tuck. It is the internal muscle tightening that is responsible for the majority of the post-operative pain and prolonged recovery after a tummy tuck. Tummy tuck patients complain of severe pain for one week afterwards and moderate pain for the next two to three weeks. They generally require prescription narcotic pain medicine for two weeks. Most patients return to a non-physical job in two to three weeks. Because of the muscle tightening, they are prohibited from heavy lifting or exercising for eight weeks.

By comparison, Smooth Tuck patients have moderate pain for seven days and require narcotic pain medicine during this time. There is considerably less pain during the second week, with


most patients taking only Tylenol for pain and returning to work in ten days. They are permitted to lift heavy items and begin exercising at 4 weeks.

Smooth Tuck provides a high level of patient satisfaction and decreases complications that often occur after tummy tucks because of patients who are unable (or unwilling) to comply with the strict post-operative restrictions. Failure to comply with restrictions after a tummy tuck may result in healing problems and breakdown of the muscle repair. Many of my patients who are avid exercisers find it difficult to remain out of the gym for 8 weeks.

Also, my patients who are mothers with small children find that these post-tummy tuck restrictions interfere with their ability to care for their children and they require childcare help, which has financial and emotional implications. Additionally, in patients with jobs that require physical or strenuous activities, the recovery from a traditional

tummy tuck and the required time off of work may place their jobs in jeopardy.

## GREAT ALTERNATIVE TO THE TRADITIONAL TUCK

The Smooth Tuck is a great option for people who are not ideal candidates for a traditional tummy tuck. It is also a great option for those who are excellent tummy tuck candidates but desire a less invasive procedure with a more rapid recovery. The procedure allows safe removal of higher volume fat, a shorter operating time, and a less painful and more rapid post-operative recovery. The cost for a Smooth Tuck procedure is about \$9,000. 



### About Dr. Schulman

Matthew R. Schulman, M.D. is board certified in Plastic Surgery. He received his medical degree from Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia and completed his General Surgery and Plastic Surgery training at The Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York. In addition to his busy Manhattan private practice, he maintains the title of Assistant Professor of Plastic Surgery at The Mount Sinai School of Medicine. Dr. Schulman is extensively published in peer-reviewed journals and popular magazines. He has appeared on national television and has been awarded "Top Plastic Surgeon," "Top Surgeon," "Top Doctor," and multiple "Patients' Choice Awards." Visit his website: [www.drschulmanplasticsurgery.com](http://www.drschulmanplasticsurgery.com), or contact him at: 212.289.1851.



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