Body Contouring
After Significant Weight Loss

Complete Your Weight-Loss Success Story
If you have lost a significant amount of weight or are thinking about losing weight to improve your quality of life, this guide will acquaint you with your body contouring options.

Making the Most of Your Weight Loss

Losing 100 pounds or more through weight loss surgery or diet and exercise is a major achievement. You can take pride in the steps you have taken to enhance your health, your appearance and your outlook on life.

Significant weight loss leaves many people with heavy, loose folds of skin around the abdomen, arms, thighs, breasts, buttocks and face. Skin that has been stretched for a long period of time sags and loses its elasticity. Like a deflated balloon, it fails to shrink back to its former size and shape.

Excess skin makes getting dressed a chore, impedes mobility, and can cause hygiene and medical problems. Chronic skin-on-skin contact can result in rashes and other sores, which can lead to infection.

Of course, excess skin is also a cosmetic issue. People who have undergone dramatic weight loss want their bodies to reflect their new, more positive self-image. Body contouring procedures are the only way to remove the excess skin left after extensive weight loss. Skin-trimming procedures will help your clothes fit better and will allow you to participate more comfortably in your favorite activities.

Cleveland Clinic’s Department of Plastic Surgery offers body contouring procedures that are designed for people who have lost massive amounts of weight. Our experienced surgeons provide consistent, satisfying results tailored to the individual patient’s needs.
To help determine whether you are likely to have a good outcome from body contouring surgery, our experienced plastic surgeons will consider important factors:

**Weight trend:** Has your weight been stable for at least a year, with no further weight loss expected? For optimal results, body contouring should not be done for approximately two years after starting any massive weight loss program.

**Overall health:** Is your overall health good, or do you have a chronic medical condition, such as diabetes or heart disease? People in poor health are not candidates for body-contouring procedures. We recommend that all patients see their primary care physician for approval to proceed with surgery.

**Nutrition:** Is your nutrition good? Problems such as protein deficiencies may impede healing.

**Smoking history:** Are you a smoker? Smoking slows down the healing process and increases the risk of serious complications during and after surgery. You must quit smoking at least six weeks prior to surgery.

**Psychological status:** Contouring procedures require mental stamina. Are you psychologically prepared?

**Expectations:** Are your goals realistic? Surgery will markedly improve your shape, but it will be impossible to restore your skin or body to what it would have been in your teens or 20s, or before your weight gain. Even after body contouring surgery, skin will continue to sag as part of the normal aging process.

Is Body Contouring for You?
Skin reduction surgery is done in stages to minimize complications such as infection and blood loss. The surgeries are often done over a period of years, addressing one or two areas of the body at a time. Also, touch-up surgeries are often required later. Your surgeon will recommend a strategy tailored to address all of your needs in the safest and most efficient manner.

In most procedures, an incision is made in the least obvious part of the area to be trimmed. Excess skin is removed, and the area is then sutured together with fine stitches to minimize scarring. (However, scarring is inevitable with these procedures.) Liposuction is sometimes combined with contouring surgery.

The plastic surgeon will work with each patient to identify which areas of the body are the most problematic or bothersome. Different procedures are done, depending upon the area addressed.

Face and neck surgery
Removing excess skin around the face or neck after weight loss is akin to a traditional facelift, except that more skin is removed. As a result, incisions need to be planned carefully. One incision is made in front of the ears, and another follows the hairline.

Combined Procedures
A combination of surgeries can be done at the same time, provided that safety criteria are met. An upper body lift may combine surgery on the arms, back and breasts/chest. A lower body lift may combine surgery on the hips, thighs, abdomen and buttocks. Planning for upper or lower body lifts is tailored to the individual patient. The plastic surgeon and patient discuss the exact procedures that will be combined.
Upper Body/Arms

**Breast surgery:** A number of breast procedures are available, including breast lift, with or without augmentation (enlargement with implants), and breast reduction. To remove excess skin, vertical incisions are usually made down the center of the breast and sometimes underneath. Incisions may also be made in the form of an upside-down “T.”

**Arm surgery:** To remove excess skin from the arm (a procedure called brachioplasty), an incision is made starting at the armpit and extending to the elbow. This procedure is sometimes combined with a breast procedure.

Lower Body/Legs

**Abdominal surgery:** Abdominoplasty, also known as a “tummy tuck,” involves removing excess skin and tightening the underlying abdominal muscles. An incision is made just above the pubic area from hip to hip, occasionally extending to the back. Sometimes a vertical incision is necessary too. You and your surgeon may determine that you need only a panniculectomy, which is simply the removal of excess skin. Sometimes an abdominal hernia is found. Depending upon its size, the plastic surgeon may repair it at the time of your abdominoplasty. In other cases, you may be referred to a general surgeon.

**Buttocks/upper thigh surgery:** A body lift, or belt lipectomy, involves surgically removing skin and lifting the thighs and buttocks. This is usually performed in conjunction with an abdominal procedure. An incision is made in the belt area of the upper hips, and excess skin is removed below the incision.

**Thigh surgery:** A medial thigh lift, designed to remove excess skin from the upper leg, requires an incision along the inner thigh. The incision starts at the groin and can extend as far as the knee.
All contouring surgeries are performed in the hospital under general anesthesia. Most require a one- to four-night stay in the hospital, so that tubes can be placed to drain excess fluid from the wound. Medications are also given to control pain and discomfort.

Some soreness, swelling and bruising are normal for two to three weeks after surgery. Most people can return to work two to four weeks later. Those with physically demanding jobs must wait at least three weeks. During this recovery period, regular office visits will ensure that your physician can monitor your progress.

Keep in mind that factors such as the specific procedures performed, your general health, your type of work and your lifestyle will influence the amount of time you spend in the hospital and away from work, along with activity restrictions.

Below are the estimated time frames for each body contouring procedure, including recovery periods. (Note that a hospital stay of “0” means that the procedure may be done on an outpatient basis.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Surgery Site</th>
<th>O.R. Time</th>
<th>Hospital Stay</th>
<th>Back to Work</th>
<th>Normal Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abdomen</td>
<td>2-5 hours</td>
<td>0-2 days</td>
<td>2-3 weeks</td>
<td>6 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thighs</td>
<td>2-4 hours</td>
<td>1-2 days</td>
<td>2-3 weeks</td>
<td>6 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breast</td>
<td>2-4 hours</td>
<td>0-1 days</td>
<td>1-2 weeks</td>
<td>3-4 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arms</td>
<td>2-3 hours</td>
<td>0-1 day</td>
<td>1-2 weeks</td>
<td>4 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face/neck</td>
<td>5 hours</td>
<td>0-1 days</td>
<td>1-2 weeks</td>
<td>3-4 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper body</td>
<td>5-6 hours</td>
<td>0-3 days</td>
<td>2-4 weeks</td>
<td>6 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower body</td>
<td>5-8 hours</td>
<td>1-4 days</td>
<td>3-4 weeks</td>
<td>6 weeks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

REMEmBER: Body Contouring Is Major Surgery

Due to the significant amount of skin removed, the risks of body contouring surgery are greater than they are for standard cosmetic surgery:

**Risks**
- Bleeding
- Infection
- Separation of Incision
- Skin Laxity
- Skin Necrosis
- Abnormal Scar Formation
- Seroma Formulation
- Asymmetry
- Unsatisfactory Result

**Side Effects**
- Swelling
- Bruising
- Soreness, pain
- Numbness
- Scars
- Depression

**Rare Complications**
- Deep Vein Thrombosis
- Pulmonary Embolism
- Myocardial Infarction (heart attack)
- Pneumonia
Taking the Next Steps

Body contouring surgery can be considered after you have maintained your weight loss goal for about one year. This will allow time for your skin to shrink as much as possible, and for your nutrition to be stabilized and optimized. These key factors will assist in your recovery.

Your first step will be to schedule a consultation with a Cleveland Clinic plastic surgeon, who will discuss your goals and map out a tailored treatment plan with you. We can show you “before” and “after” photos to help you understand the results we can achieve. We want you to be well-informed and to know what to expect. Please do not hesitate to ask us any questions at your appointment, and feel free to contact us afterward.

What About Insurance Coverage?

Insurance companies typically do not cover skin reduction surgery because they consider it cosmetic. They also may not pay for treatment of any complications that may result. Thus it is important for you to check your insurance benefits when you are considering body contouring. Our financial counselor can give you estimates on how much you can expect each procedure to cost.

For more information, or a consultation with a plastic surgeon who specializes in body contouring after weight loss:

- Plastic Surgery Department at 216.444.6900 or 800.223.2273, ext. 46900
- Talk to our financial counselors at 216.445.1331
- Visit our Web site: clevelandclinic.org/plastics
The Dermatology & Plastic Surgery Institute is one of 26 institutes at Cleveland Clinic that group multiple specialties together to provide collaborative, patient-centered care. The institute is one of the largest centers in the U.S., offering expert medical, surgical and cosmetic care, from routine skin cancer screenings to complex reconstructive surgery. Cleveland Clinic is a nonprofit, multispecialty academic medical center. Founded in 1921, it is dedicated to providing quality specialized care and includes an outpatient clinic, a hospital with more than 1,000 staffed beds, an education institute and a research institute.

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