

A comprehensive guide to belly button surgery

What it is

Blame crop tops for the current trend in belly button aesthetics. Exposed midriffs inevitably led to belly button piercing. But now all those pierced millennial belly buttons have gone saggy.

Belly button surgery or cosmetic umbilicoplasty is a minor cosmetic surgical procedure which repairs or changes the shape and size of the belly button. Most commonly an 'outie' is turned into a more discreet 'innie'. Or an innie is made more shallow and therefore less noticeable by reducing the depth of the hole.

Previously incorporated into a tummy tuck or a body lift to tidy up loose skin following pregnancy or dramatic weight loss, belly button surgery is now being requested in its own right.

Who it's for

The belly button is a hollow or raised area on the abdomen where the umbilical cord was once attached. It is actually a scar left over after cutting the umbilical cord which delivers food to the growing baby in the womb. Usually, the scar forms inside a hole after the cord is cut (an innie). However, in some cases, the muscles don't seal properly, leaving a weak spot where the abdominal tissue pushes the belly button outwards (an outie). The size and shape also depend on genetics.

The belly button can also change and stretch due to pregnancy, rapid weight loss, or ironically, belly button piercing. It stretches from a more youthful looking circular shape to a more flat or elongated shape.

A new belly button can also be created for those whose belly button was removed for medical reasons or who never had one due to an abdominal condition at birth.

Umbilicoplasty can also repair an outie or a small hernia which might develop due to the strain of pregnancy or heavy lifting and is often combined with a tummy tuck. In adults, it often gets worse if left untreated and can be painful.

What it entails

Belly button surgery is a quick one-hour procedure performed under local anaesthetic, although sedation is an option, in an outpatient surgical clinic. To reduce the size of a belly button, a small incision is made inside the navel area to lessen visible scarring, excess skin is removed and the surrounding abdominal skin tightened. The incision is closed with dissolvable stitches.

Smaller belly buttons can be made bigger, but this is more unusual and slightly more difficult. Some of the surrounding abdominal skin has to be removed and the belly button tissue gently stretched.

An outie can be turned into an innie by repairing the weak spot in the abdominal wall to prevent parts of the abdomen from poking through. Umbilicoplasty was previously used to repair umbilical hernias, especially in children, but has been hijacked by millennials for more aesthetic purposes!

Reshaping the belly button is easily combined with a tummy tuck or body lift, where the abdominal muscles are brought back together following pregnancy, but there is much longer downtime and the operation takes place in a hospital.

Questions to ask the surgeon

A good surgeon will manage your expectations to avoid dissatisfaction and the need for revision. Make sure the surgeon is not only well qualified but also experienced. Ask how many belly button surgeries they have performed, and how often. The price will depend on how much reshaping is needed.

Recovery

Belly button surgery involves little downtime. The Incision heals quickly and is usually well hidden around the rim of the belly button. Expect minor bruising and swelling for only a few days. Mild painkillers will be sufficient to manage any pain and discomfort. The stitches dissolve in 10-14 days.

A tummy tuck is more complicated so involves more downtime and more risk. Avoid pressure on the belly button and discontinue strenuous activity, including exercise for 6 weeks.

Risks/complications

Belly button surgery is low risk. However, with any surgery, there is a risk of bleeding, excess scar formation or reaction to the anaesthesia. The main risk is from infection so take care of the simple dressing on the incision. There is a small risk that the hernia might return.

Results

Turning an outie into an innie is a straightforward operation. Bear in mind that Increasing the size of the belly button is harder than reducing the size. Also, bear in mind that the results from a combined tummy tuck or body lift will depend on the amount of loose skin surrounding the belly button and the tightness of the abdominal muscles.

Alternatives

There are very few alternatives to belly button surgery. Prevention is better than cure - so don't gain or lose too much weight or you face a future of wearing baggy tops. Your facial skin will also thank you for this. Once the skin has lost elasticity, it never totally bounces back. Be careful what you have pierced!_

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