



Weight loss (bariatric) surgery and loose skin

Information for patients



Weight loss (bariatric) surgery and loose skin

This information is designed to provide you with an understanding of loose skin following rapid weight loss post-bariatric surgery.

We hope that after reading this booklet and talking to our team, you will have a better understanding of loose skin, including the impact loose skin can have and how this can be managed.

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Notes

Introduction

What is loose skin?

Loose skin is skin which has lost its elasticity and firmness, often appearing stretched, saggy, or wrinkled. It commonly occurs after significant weight loss, or as part of the natural ageing process when collagen and elastin in the skin decrease.

Loose skin can vary in appearance, from mild wrinkling to more noticeable folds, and is often most prominent in areas like the stomach, arms, thighs, neck, or face.

Factors affecting loose skin

Loose skin can occur for several reasons. As we age, skin naturally loses elasticity, making it more prone to sagging. Genetics also play a role in how your skin responds to ageing and changes in weight.

Quick and significant weight loss, especially after bariatric surgery, often results in loose skin because the skin doesn't have time to adapt. The longer someone has been overweight, the less likely their skin is to 'bounce back'.

Lifestyle factors like smoking and dehydration can further reduce skin elasticity, making loose skin more common.

Impact of loose skin

Physical impact

Loose skin can lead to physical discomfort and even pain, as the skin may rub against clothing or other areas of the body, causing irritation or chafing. Some people may feel restricted or uncomfortable during exercise or certain activities.

Skin folds often require extra care to maintain hygiene and prevent issues like rashes or fungal infections.

Emotional impact

Following bariatric surgery and significant weight loss, it's common for individuals to experience a range of emotions related to loose skin. Many may feel disappointment, as they might believe their appearance doesn't reflect the hard work they put into their weight loss journey. Feelings of sadness and shame regarding body image can also arise.

Individuals may find it challenging to adjust to their new body and struggle to notice post-surgery changes. It's important to acknowledge these feelings and understand that they are a normal part of the process.

On the other hand, in time many people report feelings of acceptance surrounding their loose skin, while some feel it represents their journey and hard work.

Coping with loose skin

Loose skin is unlikely to 'bounce back' or reduce by itself over time. Loose skin for many people will result in a permanent change to their body.

Will exercise 'fix' loose skin?

Exercises such as weight training may help to build muscle under the skin, which can help in some cases with the appearance of loose skin. However, no exercise can 'fix' or eliminate loose skin completely.

Will skin care 'fix' loose skin?

While many products may advertise that they 'cure' loose skin, there is no skin care product which can eliminate loose skin completely. Skin care products with collagen or vitamin E can support skin hydration, which may help to improve the overall health and appearance of the skin, but these will not 'fix' excessive loose skin.

Being more comfortable

Wearing compression garments or choosing clothing that flatters the new shape can help manage the appearance of loose skin. On the other hand, loose clothing may help to ease discomfort and potential chafing you may experience.

Surgical options

Several surgical options are available to address loose skin:

- **Tummy Tuck (Abdominoplasty):** Removes excess skin from the abdomen.
- **Arm Lift (Brachioplasty):** Removes excess skin from the upper arms.
- **Thigh Lift:** Removes excess skin from the thighs.
- **Body Lift:** A more extensive surgery that removes excess skin around the torso, including the abdomen, hips, thighs, and buttocks.
- **Breast Lift (Mastopexy):** Lifts and reshapes breasts.

Unless there is a significant physical medical need linked to loose skin, unfortunately, surgery for loose skin is not offered within NHS services. You will need to pay privately for loose skin surgery. As with all surgeries, loose skin surgery carries risks. It is important that when investigating private options, you access plastic surgeons who are qualified and certified. You can find a list of certified surgeons here: <https://baaps.org.uk>

Emotional support

If you are experiencing emotional distress as a result of loose skin, you can access support from the Bariatric Psychology team by contacting chelwest.bariatric.psychology@nhs.net or speak with your GP about your local psychology services.

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Speak to your clinician