

Upper Arm Lift (Brachioplasty)

General procedure information

An upper arm lift (sometimes known as a “brachioplasty”) is part of a cosmetic surgery procedure called body contouring, which is designed to remove skin and fat from the upper arms.

Your consultation

During your consultation, your surgeon will inform you about surgery, ask about your goals for the procedure and discuss what you should expect.

It's very important that you be totally frank with your surgeon about your expectations and the goals you want to achieve – and equally important that your surgeon be frank with you about your alternatives and the pluses and minuses of each.

Careful discussions regarding the reasons for wanting an upper arm lift and your suitability for this type of surgery are very important at this stage. Make sure that you obtain as much information as is necessary to enable you to make a fully informed choice and make sure you receive satisfactory answers to all your questions.

It may be that liposuction alone will achieve the results that you desire. You need to talk this option through with your surgeon, along with all your other concerns, at your first meeting.

Preparing for surgery

At your initial consultation, your surgeon will take a complete medical history. Having your surgeon know about your medical background is very important, so please be sure to provide all the information you can.

If you decide to proceed with treatment, your surgeon will give you specific instructions, including guidelines on eating, drinking and taking certain vitamins and medications.

Because smoking decreases circulation and interferes with proper healing, your surgeon will also instruct you to stop smoking for a minimum of one to two weeks before your surgery and during your recovery.

Your operation

Upper arm lift surgery is usually performed under general anaesthetic and you can either return home the same day or stay in hospital overnight. The procedure normally takes between one and two hours, depending on the extent of work required, and whether any other procedures such as liposuction are also involved.

This operation requires the surgeons to make long cuts through your skin and, therefore, you will be left with long scars after the surgery. The length of the scar will depend on how much excess skin you have.

Depending on the surgeon, and the extent of the body lift procedure, scars may run from the armpit to the elbow, and may be curved or zig – zagged. This should help healing by enabling the scars to close up as quickly as possible. Crescent or “smile”-shaped segments of skin and fat from underneath the skin are removed from the upper arm, and the remaining skin and tissue are lifted to achieve a tighter and smoother effect.

After an upper arm lift, dressings will be applied, and temporary tubes may be put in to drain excess fluid from the area of surgery, which will be removed after 24 hours. Firm elastic bandages are then applied to support the area.

Recovery

There is quite a severe amount of pain and discomfort during the healing process, but this can usually be controlled effectively with painkillers.

Returning to work depends on the nature of the job you do, but most people usually go back after about 2 weeks.

Bruising is visible after upper arm lift surgery and can spread down the arms. Swelling can also be very obvious and can take up to three or four months to disappear. You may also experience numbness of the skin around the upper arms and it may take several months for the sensation to return.

Light exercise is usually recommended as it helps with the healing process and reduces the chance of developing blood clots, but you must not undertake strenuous exercise routines. Your surgeon will advise when you can return to normal activities.

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Risks and complications

Like all surgical procedures, there is always a possibility of risks or side effects and, although rare, complications can include infection, a reaction to the anaesthetic, blood or fluid collection underneath the skin, nerve damage, blood clots, and an irregular or a “lop-sided” appearance of the arms after the operation.

The surgery does produce a permanent scar. Your scars may actually appear to worsen during the first three to six months as they heal, but this is normal. Expect it to take nine months to a year before your scars flatten out and lighten in colour.