

POST-SURGICAL RECOVERY GUIDE · 02

Lymphatic drainage after a tummy tuck

The drains are finally out. You can stand a little straighter.

But the lower belly still feels puffy and tight... especially below the scar. By evening, it's worse.

That's your lymphatic system asking for a little help.

01

What's happening in your body

Lymph from your lower belly normally travels down toward the lymph nodes in your groin. A tummy tuck incision runs right across that path, and lifting the skin disrupts the small vessels underneath. A tummy tuck is one of the procedures that can simply overwhelm the lymphatic system for a while.

So fluid collects in the lower abdomen and around the pubic area until new pathways form. Lymphatic drainage re-routes that fluid around the scar, up toward the nodes in your armpits and out to the groin, easing the pressure while your body rebuilds.

If you had lipo to the flanks as well (hello, mommy makeover), there's more fluid to move, and more to gain from early care.

02

Why timing around your drains matters

Your surgical drains are doing lymphatic work for you. Once they come out, the fluid they were collecting stays in the tissue, which is exactly what manual lymphatic drainage helps move. That's why many clients feel the biggest difference from sessions in the days right after drain removal.

03

Your recovery timeline

WHEN	WHAT'S TYPICAL	HOW WE SUPPORT YOU
Week 1	Drains in, bent at the waist, very tender	Rest, walking, binder. Pre-op session if booked.
Drains out (often days 5–14)	Lower belly fills with fluid, feels tight	First session within 1–2 days, with clearance
Weeks 2–6	Swelling worse by evening, standing straighter	1–2 sessions per week

WHEN	WHAT'S TYPICAL	HOW WE SUPPORT YOU
Weeks 6–12	Swelling below the scar lingers	Weekly or as needed. Scar work once healed.
Months 3–12	Final shape emerges, residual lower-belly swelling	Tune-ups, scar mobility

04

Your Renu tummy tuck plan

First session: a day or two after drains come out, with surgeon clearance.

How many sessions? Some clients need only 3–4 sessions for a tummy tuck alone. Surgical clinics often recommend more when liposuction is added. Our usual range is 3–6 for a tummy tuck, 8–12 for a tummy tuck with lipo or a mommy makeover, tapering as swelling settles.

Scar care, later. Once your incision is fully healed and your surgeon agrees, gentle scar mobilisation helps the scar glide instead of sticking to the tissue underneath. Keep it gentle: a minute or two, a couple of times a day, is often enough.

A tummy tuck needs its own drainage plan, because the re-routing pattern is different from other surgeries.

05

What a session feels like

You'll be comfortably propped, never lying flat while you're still bent at the waist. We begin with slow belly breathing, then the neck, armpits and sides of your body, before we ever work near your abdomen.

The incision is left alone. We work around it, never across it, and never press fluid out of it.

06

What we will never do

- Push fluid out through your incision or drain sites
- Work on an open or unhealed incision
- Use deep pressure or heat on the abdomen
- Treat if we see signs of infection or seroma. We'll send you back to your surgeon.

07

At home between sessions

- ☐ Keep wearing your binder or compression exactly as prescribed
- ☐ Short, frequent walks, even slightly hunched at first
- ☐ Gentle belly breathing to move the deep lymph
- ☐ Sleep propped as your surgeon advises
- ☐ No heat on the abdomen and no firm self-massage until cleared
- ☐ Expect swelling to be worse at the end of the day. That's normal.

WHEN TO GET MEDICAL HELP

Call your surgeon if...

- Fever over 38°C, chills or a racing heart
- Spreading redness or warmth, or red streaks
- Cloudy, coloured or foul-smelling drainage
- An incision that separates or opens
- Skin near the incision turns dark, dusky or grey
- A soft, sloshing or rapidly growing bulge (possible seroma)
- Calf pain or one-sided leg swelling, chest pain or breathlessness

09 · QUESTIONS

Your questions, answered

When can I get lymphatic massage after a tummy tuck?

Usually a day or two after your drains are removed, once your surgeon clears you.

Why is my lower belly still swollen after a tummy tuck?

The incision interrupts the lymph pathways that drain your lower abdomen. Swelling below the scar can linger for months while new routes form.

How many lymphatic sessions do I need after a tummy tuck?

Often 3–6 for a tummy tuck alone, and 8–12 if liposuction was included.

Can lymphatic drainage help prevent a seroma?

It may help by moving fluid before it pools, but a seroma that has formed needs your surgeon, not massage.

Will lymphatic drainage affect my scar?

We don't work on the incision. Once healed, gentle scar work can help it feel softer and move more freely.

Is lymphatic drainage covered by insurance in Alberta?

Many extended health plans cover massage therapy by a Registered Massage Therapist. We provide RMT receipts.

WHY RENU

Not all "lymphatic massage" is the same.

After surgery, you're trusting someone with healing tissue. Here's what you get at Renu.

Led by a Certified Lymphedema Therapist with 10 years' experience. Our post-op and lymphedema program is led by Meeghan Mackenzie, RMT since 2005 and a Certified Lymphedema Therapist since 2016. Meeghan earned her CLT through the Academy of Lymphatic Studies' 135-hour Complete Lymphedema Certification, which covers Manual Lymph Drainage and Complete Decongestive Therapy, the same standard used to treat lymphedema after cancer. She is one of roughly 350 CLTs in Canada.

Trained in the world's leading lymphatic methods. Beyond her CLT, Meeghan has trained in:

- Vodder Manual Lymph Drainage, the original method developed by Dr. Emil Vodder and the foundation of lymphatic therapy worldwide
- Földi, the German school behind Complete Decongestive Therapy, named for the Földi Clinic in the Black Forest, one of Europe's leading lymphology centres
- Chikly Lymph Drainage Therapy, which teaches therapists to feel the rhythm, direction and depth of lymph flow, map pathways by hand, and work with scar tissue and fibrosis

That combination lets us choose the right approach for your body and your surgery, not a one-size-fits-all routine.

Over 20 years of hands-on experience, with a clinical focus on oncology, lymphedema and surgical recovery.

Registered Massage Therapy receipts for your extended health plan.

Honest care. We tell you what lymphatic work can do, what it can't, and when you need your surgeon instead.

What to look for in any post-op therapist:

- A regulated health licence (in Alberta, an RMT, physiotherapist, OT or nurse)
- Formal lymphatic or lymphedema certification, not a weekend course
- Light, comfortable technique. If it hurts, it isn't lymphatic drainage
- No pushing fluid out of incisions
- Clear, published pricing, and willingness to work with your surgeon

FOR YOU TO KEEP

My recovery notes

Bring this page to your sessions. It helps us plan your care around your surgeon's instructions.

PROCEDURE

SURGERY DATE

SURGEON AND CLINIC PHONE

CLEARED FOR LYMPHATIC DRAINAGE ON

COMPRESSION INSTRUCTIONS

SESSION DATE	HOW I'M FEELING · NOTES



GIVE FRESH LIFE OR STRENGTH TO.

YOUR NEXT STEP

Drains out? Belly still tight?

Let's get that fluid moving... gently. Book a post-op lymphatic session at renu.janeapp.com or call 403-270-2111, and we'll help you time your first visit around your drain removal.

BOOK ONLINE

renu.janeapp.com

CALL

403-270-2111

VISIT

200, 209 19 St NW
Calgary AB T2N 2H9

HOURS

Monday to Friday 8:00 am to 8:30 pm
Saturday and Sunday 10:00 am to 5:00 pm

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This guide is general education to support your recovery. It doesn't replace the advice of your surgeon or medical team. Always follow your surgeon's instructions, and seek medical care for any of the warning signs listed in this guide.

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