



Exercise and Plastic Surgery: How Soon Is Too Soon?



You: *Wait a second... are you telling me that in order to recover from a surgical procedure that is meant to make me look and feel better, I must refrain from exercising which also makes me look and feel better?*

SmartBeautyGuide: *Yes. That's precisely what we're telling you. And it's in your best interest to listen.*

We hate a double-edged sword as much as the next person, but here's the deal. After most plastic surgery procedures, you will be advised to put your fitness routine on hold and avoid most—if not all—exercise for a specific period of time. **tears** We know. But surgery takes a tremendous toll on the body, and following your surgeon's orders, both pre- and post-surgery, is essential to a happy and complication-free recovery. If your surgeon says “jump,” you say “how high?” Except you won't actually be doing any “jumping” at all.

Since interpretation sometimes comes into play when you utter the words “exercise,” “light,” and “listening to your doctor,” now is the perfect time for nitpicking. So let's answer a few of the most obvious questions as to why your surgeon might recommend such barbaric recovery demands and why you, as the patient should follow them to a T.

How long will I be a sedentary sloth?

First of all. You won't be a sedentary sloth (let's not be dramatic). Most plastic surgeons will recommend that patients wait 4 to 6 weeks before beginning to build up to their previous fitness regimen.

How do they come up with these mystical 4 to 6 week recovery numbers?

Your surgeon will consider your age, your condition and the type of cosmetic surgery you had when recommending how long you must refrain from activity. It's true that the ideal amount of time will vary from patient to patient, and patients who are more fit prior to surgery will likely recover faster, but if

you're intending to use either of those things to rationalize your way back to the gym, we suggest you think again.

What do you mean “light”? How “light” is “light” exactly?

You can trust that by “light” your surgeon likely means starting with a gentle walk up and down your living room or maybe down the driveway. Trust us when we say that, after most surgeries, this will be enough, and you'll be exhausted. From there you may be allowed to try a walk around the block. Next you might gingerly step aboard an elliptical machine and possibly do some yoga. Then you'll work your way back up to impactful aerobic activity until you're ready to start back with resistance and other weight training. Your return to any meaningful exercise is going to take time and will happen as a progression, so cool your jets and listen to your surgeon.

Then why would my surgeon recommend “light” exercise at all?! Are they just toying with me?

Silly goose. Your surgeon doesn't have time for merriment. All humor aside, the recommended “light” exercise has a very specific purpose and benefit. Post-surgical walking stimulates circulation, helping to prevent certain complications of both the lungs and legs, like clot formation and venous emboli. Refraining from vigorous exercise post-surgery can also help you heal faster.

Your surgeon may also add a little “light” stretching, yoga or other no-impact exercise to help enhance blood flow and promote the good-feelies and well-being that's always beneficial, but particularly when you're recovering from surgery. By deferring to your doctors recovery orders, you'll heal a lot faster than if you don't.

But isn't my surgeon's “order” to not exercise really just a “suggestion”?

Um. No. Returning too quickly to vigorous exercise can not only be uncomfortable, but it can also lead to serious complications. Let's drive this one home with some examples:

- Exercise too soon after [rhinoplasty](#) and you could end up with nose bleeding.
- Exercise too soon after a [facelift](#) and you could encounter swelling, delayed healing, bleeding, fluid collection.

These examples should scare the bejesus out of you, but even if they don't, we can all agree that none of them sound like all that much fun.

Let's take it one step further. The rise in heart rate and blood pressure from vigorous exercise can be harmful to all surgeries in the postoperative period—causing increased swelling, bruising, fluid collection (which can lead to infection), wound breakdown and the need for revision surgery. Revision what?! Exactly, and this is why your surgeon will advise that you lay low for the recommended period of time after surgery.

Any good board-certified plastic surgeon will place patient safety first in their surgical practices, so when they say refrain from exercise, you should listen like your recovery depends on it... because, in truth, it does.