

Labiaplasty

What is a Labiaplasty?

Labiaplasty is a surgical procedure that will reduce and/or reshape the labia minora - the skin that covers the female clitoris and vaginal opening. Women with large labia complain of pain during intercourse, discomfort during everyday activities and often feel considerable embarrassment. Labial reduction can greatly improve the aesthetic appearance of the abnormally enlarged labia.

What does the surgery involve?

The procedure can be performed under local or general anaesthetic and takes up to 1-2 hours to perform. It involves removal of excess tissue by a wedge excision, leaving an imperceptible scar. The wound is closed with dissolving stitches and an antibiotic cream is applied locally.

What are the risks and side effects of surgery?

Having cosmetic surgery can be a very positive experience. Complications are infrequent and usually minor. However, no surgery is without risk and it is important that you are aware of possible complications.

A **haematoma** (collection of blood in the wound) can occur. This is most likely to occur within 24 hours of surgery. Large haematomas may need to be drained in the operating theatre, under a general anaesthetic.

Infection may occur but again this is rare. Infections can usually be treated successfully with antibiotics.

Everybody heals differently, and this is not always predictable. **Poor or delayed healing** occasionally occurs. These healing difficulties are exceptionally rare but can range from minor problems, such as small areas of wound separation, to major issues, such as skin loss. People who have diabetes, smoke, are obese or elderly are at an increased risk of delayed healing.

There is **always permanent scarring** where the incisions are made. Although these usually fade and soften up to a year after surgery, scars can occasionally thicken and stretch. Darker skinned people have more of a chance of forming thick scars (hypertrophic or keloid scars).

Asymmetry/shape irregularities can occur following this operation. In rare cases, further surgery is needed to correct this. Most patients are not symmetrical before surgery and we would hope to be able to correct some of these differences. However, it is important to note this before surgery, or you

will understandably think that the surgery caused the difference in appearance.

There are general risks associated with all operations. Very occasionally a blood clot can form in the leg (**deep vein thrombosis or DVT**) which would require medical treatment. Part of these clots can also break off and move up to the lungs, causing acute shortness of breath and pain in the chest. This is known as a **pulmonary embolus (P.E.)**. Developing a **chest infection** is uncommon but more likely to happen to people who smoke.

All the risks will be discussed in detail at your consultation. However, if you have further questions or concerns, do not hesitate to discuss these with your surgeon. Decisions about cosmetic surgery should never be rushed.

How do I prepare for surgery?

Having had your initial consultation, if you decide to proceed, a mutually convenient date for your operation will be made. Prior to your admission, you may be invited to attend the hospital for a pre-operative assessment with a nurse. Depending on your age and general health, routine blood tests, and heart tracing (ECG) may be taken. You will be given the opportunity to ask any questions you may have or raise any concerns.

You will be admitted to the hospital on the day of your operation. If you are having a general anaesthetic, you will be asked not to eat anything six hours before surgery. Black tea/coffee or non-fizzy drinks (nothing containing milk) can be taken up to two hours before surgery. Chewing gum should also be avoided six hours before your operation.

It is important to inform your surgeon, anaesthetist and nurse of any medicines (self or GP prescribed) or recreational drugs you take. Medicines containing aspirin should be avoided for two weeks before the operation since they increase the risk of bleeding during surgery. If there are any other medications that may affect surgery then this will be discussed with you at your first appointment.

What happens after the operation?

Once you have recovered from your anaesthetic, you will be encouraged to sit up in bed.

Healing is generally rapid and personal hygiene with washing is possible on the day after surgery. Keep the area clean and dry and it is useful to use a sanitary pad to avoid soiling of undergarments with some inevitable wound oozing.

Swelling and bruising after surgery are typical but settle rapidly and scarring takes longer. The final shape of the labia is best assessed only after 6 months of surgery.

Before you leave the hospital, you will be given a follow up appointment to see either the surgeon and/or nurse. This is to check on your progress and also the wounds. You will not be able to drive yourself home from hospital and ideally, you should have someone to stay with you for a few days to lend a hand. If any non dissolvable stitches have been used, these will be removed about 10 days after surgery.

What is the estimated time for recovery, absence from work and return to usual activities?

Recovery times vary from one person to another so use the times given below as a guide only. If you have any concerns during this period, do contact the hospital team for advice.

In the first two days after your operation, it is important for you to be out of bed and walking every two hours during the day and early evening. Staying in bed too long increases your chances of developing clots in the legs. Gradually increase your activity over the next few days.

Labiaplasty post surgery timeline

Day 1 to 7	Week 2	4 to 6 weeks	6 to 9 months
<p>You may have some discomfort for a week. Mild painkillers will help with this but avoid taking aspirin.</p> <p>Take regular baths and pat dry.</p> <p>Keep walking around to avoid post operative complications.</p>	<p>Might pull and hurt a little when you move around.</p> <p>Gradually begin to increase your activity.</p> <p>Depending on your job, should be able to return to work from 1 week.</p> <p>Drive only when you feel safe.</p>	<p>Scar continues to improve.</p> <p>Still slightly swollen.</p>	<p>Scars will begin to soften and fade.</p> <p>Can start to judge the result.</p>