

Specific Risks of Arm Lift or Brachioplasty

Every surgical procedure involves a certain amount of risk and it is important that you understand these risks and the possible complications associated with them. In addition, every procedure has limitations. An individual's choice to undergo a surgical procedure is based on the comparison of the risk to potential benefit. Although most patients do not experience these complications, you should discuss them with your plastic surgeon at The Aesthetic Center by Kaiser Permanente to make sure you understand the possible risks of arm lift surgery.

Change in Sensation

It is common to experience diminished (or loss of) skin sensation in areas that have had surgery (upper arm, armpit). It is rare to experience permanent changes in sensation in the hands and forearms after brachioplasty, but it is possible. Diminished (or complete loss of) skin sensation may not totally resolve after brachioplasty. There is a small risk of motor nerve injury which may result in impairment of upper extremity/hand function.

Skin Discoloration/Swelling

Bruising and swelling normally occurs following brachioplasty. The skin in or near the surgical site can appear either lighter or darker than surrounding skin. Although uncommon, swelling (including the forearms and hands) and skin discoloration may persist for long periods of time and, in rare situations, may be permanent.

Sensation of Arm Tightness

After lifting the arm skin, there can be a sensation of the arm and/or armpit skin being tight. There could potentially be loss of range of motion of the shoulder. Usually this subsides over time. Additional surgery may be required to correct this problem.

Pain

You will experience pain after your surgery. Pain of varying intensity and duration may occur and persist after brachioplasty surgery. Chronic pain may occur very infrequently from nerves becoming trapped in scar tissue (neuromas) or be due to decreased mobility of scarred skin.

Delayed Healing

Wound disruption or delayed wound healing is possible. Some areas of skin may die or slough. This may require frequent dressing changes or further surgery to remove the non-healed tissue. Individuals who have decreased blood supply to tissue from past surgery or radiation therapy may be at increased risk for wound healing and poor surgical outcome. Smokers have a greater risk of skin loss and wound healing complications.

Scars

All surgery leaves scars, some more visible than others. Although good wound healing after a surgical procedure is expected, this surgery will result in long, prominent scars that are permanent. Abnormal scars may occur within the skin and deeper tissues. Scars may be unattractive and of different color than the surrounding skin tone. Scar appearance may also vary within the same scar. Scars may be asymmetrical (appear different on the right and left side of the body). There is the possibility of visible marks in the skin from sutures. These scars may become raised, red, or discolored in the first few weeks/months, but usually settle down over time. However, some patients are prone to "hypertrophic" or "keloid" scars i.e. prominent, raised, red scars that do not settle. Further treatments with medications and/or surgery may be required.

Seromas (Fluid Collection)

Infrequently, fluid may accumulate between the skin and the underlying tissues following surgery, trauma or vigorous exercise. Should this problem occur, it may require additional procedures for drainage of fluid. To help prevent this, surgical drains are usually employed.

Use of Drains

During your surgery, your doctor may find it necessary to place a drain(s). A drain is a small tube that drains fluid out from the area that was operated on. You will be instructed on the use of your drain. Placement of the drain may require a small separate incision. The drain will be removed when your doctor feels it is no longer necessary. The drain site may be closed at the time of drain removal. Closing the drain site may require special surgical tape or sometimes a suture. Your doctor may leave the site open to drain any residual fluid under the wound.

Re-Loosening of Skin

Almost all patients who have this procedure will notice re-loosening of the skin over time. This occurs due to the body's inherent response to stretch. Patients who have lost massive amounts of weight are prone to this phenomenon. No matter how tight the surgeon makes your skin at the time of surgery, it will re-loosen with time to a certain degree. Everyone loosens to a different degree.

Asymmetry

Symmetrical body appearance may not result after surgery. Factors such as skin tone, fatty deposits, skeletal prominence, and muscle tone may contribute to normal asymmetry in body features. Most patients have differences between the right and left side of their bodies before any surgery is performed. Additional surgery may be necessary to attempt to diminish asymmetry.

Persistent Swelling (Lymphedema)

Persistent swelling can occur following surgery.