

Chapter Fourteen

S H R I N K !

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As the title states, you've had surgery to *shrink*, you *shrank* down to a more healthy weight, and now you've pretty much *shrunk* to the size you want to maintain. Can you conjugate the verb "to shrink? I bet you can if you try..." (Apologies to Mr. Rogers. He probably won't be my neighbor now that I've made fun of him.) So, now that you've been through this process, what's left is maintaining your new weight and healthy lifestyle, and dealing with a few other little issues and questions that might crop up.

One of the most commonly raised patient questions goes something like this: "What about all that extra, flabby, hangy-down skin after you lose the weight? Isn't that a big problem?" I usually respond, "If in one to two years you have extra, flabby-type skin hanging around, it is an excellent problem to have!" I say this not to be dismissive or insensitive, but to point out that the apparent cosmetic dislike of excessive skin pales in significance to the medical problems related to the morbid obesity you had in the first place.

In other words, by the time you have baggy skin (if you have it at all – a lot of patients do not have excess skin issues), many, if not most of your serious weight related medical problems will be significantly improved, and maybe even gone. Unlike obesity, baggy skin does not lead to diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, arthritis, sleep apnea, stroke, and an increased risk of some cancers. Many long for the day when the only problem they have to deal with is some "hangy-down" skin! Having plastic surgery to remove excess skin is not the automatic final step in the bariatric surgery process.

According to the American Society for Bariatric Surgery, in 2004 approximately 140,000 people had weight loss surgery in the United States alone, and the number is expected to more than double in 2005.¹ That was significantly more than had the surgery in 2003, and according to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, more than 52,000 post-bariatric plastic surgery procedures were performed in 2003 (remembering that many patients had more than one plastic surgery procedure performed).²

The number of patients seeking plastic surgery for body contouring after dramatic weight loss is expected to increase by at least 20 percent in 2005 over the 2004 numbers, according to the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons.³

Body contouring after bariatric surgery has become a field of special interest to many plastic surgeons, and they are beginning to realize that bariatric patients have