

LIPOSUCTION

Liposuction is a procedure that can help sculpt the body by removing unwanted fat from specific areas, including the abdomen, hips, buttocks, thighs, knees, upper arms, chin, cheeks and neck. During the past decade, liposuction, which is also known as "lipoplasty", "liposculpture" or "suction lipectomy," has benefited from several new refinements. Today, a number of new techniques, including ultrasound-assisted lipoplasty (UAL), the tumescent technique, and the super-wet technique, are helping to provide selected patients with more precise results and quicker recovery times. Although no type of liposuction is a substitute for dieting and exercise, liposuction can remove stubborn areas of fat that don't respond to traditional weight-loss methods.

THE BEST CANDIDATES FOR LIPOSUCTION

To be a good candidate for liposuction, you must have realistic expectations about what the procedure can do for you. It's important to understand that liposuction can enhance your appearance and self confidence, but it won't necessarily change your looks to match your ideal or cause other people to treat you differently.

The best candidates for liposuction are normal-weight people with firm, elastic skin who have pockets of excess fat in certain areas. You should be physically healthy, psychologically stable and realistic in your expectations. Your age is not a major consideration; however, older patients may have diminished skin elasticity and may not achieve the same results as a younger patient with tighter skin.

Liposuction carries greater risk for individuals with medical problems such as diabetes, significant heart or lung disease, poor blood circulation, or those who have recently had surgery near the area to be contoured.

PLANNING YOUR SURGERY

In your initial consultation, your surgeon will evaluate your health, determine where your fat deposits lie and assess the condition of your skin. Your surgeon will explain the body-contouring methods that may be most appropriate for you. For example, if you believe you want liposuction in the abdominal area, you may learn that an abdominoplasty or "tummy tuck" may more effectively meet your goals; or that a combination of traditional liposuction and UAL would be the best choice for you.

PREPARING FOR YOUR SURGERY

We will give you specific instructions on how to prepare for surgery, including guidelines on eating and drinking, smoking, and taking or avoiding vitamins, iron tablets and certain medications. If you develop a cold or an infection of any kind, especially a skin infection, your surgery may have to be postponed.

Though it is rarely necessary, sometimes may be necessary that you have blood drawn ahead of time in case it is needed during surgery.

Also, while you are making preparations, be sure to arrange for someone to drive you home after the procedure and, if needed, to help you at home for a day or two.

ABOUT THE OPERATION

Smaller-volume liposuction is usually done on an outpatient basis for reasons of cost and convenience. However, if a large volume of fat will be removed, or if the liposuction is being performed in conjunction with other procedures, a stay in a hospital or overnight nursing facility is required.

Various types of anesthesia can be used for liposuction procedures. Together, we will select the type of anesthesia that provides the most safe and effective level of comfort for your surgery.

If only a small amount of fat and a limited number of body sites are involved, liposuction can be performed under local anesthesia, which numbs

only the affected areas. However, if you prefer, the local is usually used along with intravenous sedation to keep you more relaxed during the procedure. Regional anesthesia can be a good choice for more extensive procedures. One type of regional anesthesia is the epidural block, the same type of anesthesia commonly used in childbirth.

However, some patients prefer general anesthesia, particularly if a large volume of fat is being removed.

The time required to perform liposuction may vary considerably, depending on the size of the area, the amount of fat being removed, the type of anesthesia and the technique used.

There are several liposuction techniques that can be used to improve the ease of the procedure and to enhance outcome.

Liposuction is a procedure in which localized deposits of fat are removed to recontour one or more areas of the body. Through a tiny incision, a narrow tube or cannula is inserted and used to vacuum the fat layer that lies deep beneath the skin. The cannula is pushed then pulled through the fat layer, breaking up the fat cells and suctioning them out. The suction action is provided by a vacuum pump or a large syringe, depending on the surgeon's preference. The incisions are placed to be as inconspicuous as possible.

Fluid is lost along with the fat, and it's crucial that this fluid be replaced during the procedure to prevent shock. For this reason, patients need to be carefully monitored and receive intravenous fluids during and immediately after surgery.

TECHNIQUE VARIATIONS

The basic technique of liposuction, as described above, is used in all patients undergoing this procedure. However, as the procedure has been developed and refined, several variations have been introduced.

Fluid Injection, a technique in which a medicated solution is injected into fatty areas before the fat is removed, is commonly used by plastic surgeons

today. The fluid -- a mixture of intravenous salt solution, lidocaine (a local anesthetic) and epinephrine (a drug that contracts blood vessels) -- helps the fat be removed more easily, reduces blood loss and provides anesthesia during and after surgery. Fluid injection also helps to reduce the amount of bruising after surgery.

The amount of fluid that is injected varies depending on the preference of the surgeon. I prefer the super-wet technique, similar to the tumescent technique, except that lesser amounts of fluid are used. Usually the amount of fluid injected is equal to the amount of fat to be removed. This technique often requires IV sedation or general anesthesia and typically takes one to two hours of surgery time.

Ultrasound-Assisted Lipoplasty (UAL). This technique requires the use of a special cannula that produces ultrasonic energy. As it passes through the areas of fat, the energy explodes the walls of the fat cells, liquefying the fat. The fat is then removed with the traditional liposuction technique.

UAL has been shown to improve the ease and effectiveness of liposuction in fibrous areas of the body, such as the upper back or the enlarged male breast. It is also commonly used in secondary procedures, when enhanced precision is needed. In general, UAL takes longer to perform than traditional liposuction.

- Neck : the turkey gobble can be managed by liposuction. Usually it is associated to lifting.
- Arms : Traditional excision of fat in this area, leaving a conspicuous scar is rarely performed nowadays. With liposuction, we have extirpated great amounts of fat (1000 cc) with a very good cutaneous retraction. It only needs particular postoperative rules to ease the retraction of the skin.
- Abdomen: in young patients or with good cutaneous elasticity the leftover fat can be eliminated with liposuction alone. If there is muscular weakness (diastasis of recti) due to either previous pregnancies or surgeries or where there is a great excess of skin (ie after massive weight loss) the open surgery is the solution (abdominoplasty).

- Back : In many occasions we associate it to the liposuction of abdomen.
- Hips and buttocks : it is the most popular area to treat. The important thing is to contour, to perform liposculpture. In order to obtain a good retraction of the skin it is necessary to suction very superficial leaving the skin very thin. At the same time the buttock is contoured, redefining the folds to give a more youthful look.
- Knees : it is possible to eliminate the fat in the inner and frontal aspects of the knee.
- Legs : Mainly at the level of ankles and also to contour the posterior aspect of the legs.

ALL SURGERY CARRIES SOME UNCERTAINTY AND RISK

Liposuction is normally safe, as long as patients are carefully selected, the operating facility is properly equipped and the physician is adequately trained.

However, it's important to keep in mind that even though a well-trained surgeon and a state-of-the art facility can improve your chance of having a good result, there are no guarantees. Though they are rare, complications can and do occur. Risks increase if a greater number of areas are treated at the same time, or if the operative sites are larger in size. Removal of a large amount of fat and fluid may require longer operating times than may be required for smaller operations.

The combination of these factors can create greater hazards for infection; delays in healing; the formation of fat clots or blood clots, which may migrate to the lungs and cause death; excessive fluid loss, which can lead to shock or fluid accumulation that must be drained; friction burns or other damage to the skin or nerves or perforation injury to the vital organs; and unfavorable drug reactions.

There are also points to consider with the newer techniques. For example, in UAL, the heat from the ultrasound device used to liquefy the fat cells may cause injury to the skin or deeper tissues. Also, you should be aware that

even though UAL has been performed successfully on several thousand people worldwide, the long-term effects of ultrasound energy on the body are not yet known.

In the tumescent and super-wet techniques, the anesthetic fluid that is injected may cause lidocaine toxicity (if the solution's lidocaine content is too high), or the collection of fluid in the lungs (if too much fluid is administered).

The scars from liposuction are small and strategically placed to be hidden from view. However, imperfections in the final appearance are not uncommon after lipoplasty. The skin surface may be irregular, asymmetric or even "baggy," especially in the older patient. Numbness and pigmentation changes may occur. Sometimes, additional surgery may be recommended.

AFTER YOUR SURGERY

After surgery, you will likely experience some fluid drainage from the incisions. Occasionally, a small drainage tube may be inserted beneath the skin for a couple of days to prevent fluid build-up. To control swelling and to help your skin better fit its new contours, you may be fitted with a snug elastic garment to wear over the treated area for a few weeks. Antibiotics are prescribed to prevent infection.

Don't expect to look or feel great right after surgery. Even though the newer techniques are believed to reduce some post-operative discomforts, you may still experience some pain, burning, swelling, bleeding and temporary numbness. Pain can be controlled with medications prescribed by your surgeon, though you may still feel stiff and sore for a few days.

It is normal to feel a bit anxious or depressed in the days or weeks following surgery. However, this feeling will subside as you begin to look and feel better.

GETTING BACK TO NORMAL

Healing is a gradual process. You will have to start walking around as soon as possible to reduce swelling and to help prevent blood clots from forming in your legs. You will begin to feel better after about a week or two and you should be back at work within a few days following your surgery. The stitches are removed or dissolve on their own within the first week to 10 days.

Physical activity along with massages and lymphatic drainage are started by the first week postoperatively. It helps the skin to contract and adapt to the underlying structures.

Although most of the bruising and swelling usually disappears within three weeks, some swelling may remain for six months or more.

If you have any unusual symptoms between visits -- for example, heavy bleeding or a sudden increase in pain -- or any questions about what you can and can't do, call your doctor.

YOUR NEW LOOK

You will see a noticeable difference in the shape of your body quite soon after surgery. However, improvement will become even more apparent after about four to six weeks, when most of the swelling has subsided. After about three months, any persistent mild swelling usually disappears and the final contour will be visible.

If your expectations are realistic, you will probably be very pleased with the results of your surgery. You may find that you are more comfortable in a wide variety of clothes and more at ease with your body. And, by eating a healthy diet and getting regular exercise, you can help to maintain your new shape.