

Liposuction

General procedure information

To be truly beautiful, a body must have a smooth, well-contoured silhouette. The lines should be perfect, coherent and free from unsightly bulges.

Unfortunately, many people have inherited a tendency to develop fat deposits that spoil this perfect line. These bulges, which are most common in areas like the hips, thighs, abdomen, knees, ankles, face and neck, do not routinely respond to diet or exercise.

Liposuction, however, can help sculpt and re-contour the body by removing unwanted fat from specific areas, eliminating bulges and establishing a pleasing line.

One of today's most satisfying and effective cosmetic procedures, liposuction uses a small stainless steel tube, called a cannula, that is connected to a powerful suction device. This cannula is inserted into the area of fat through a very small incision and the fat is removed by the suction.

- Today, thanks to cannulas that are only three or four millimeters in diameter, incisions are so tiny they no longer need stitches.
- In addition, a new technique called tumescent liposuction is helping selected patients achieve more precise results and recover faster.

Liposuction may be performed on several areas at the same time or combined with other procedures. For example, it may be done in conjunction with a facelift if excess fat is present under the chin. It is also often used to treat conditions like gynecomastia, where fat is deposited in the chest wall and lipodistrophy where abnormal deposits of fat have formed.

Thinking it through

The best candidates for liposuction are people of normal weight who have firm, elastic skin and localized pockets of excess fat. It is not appropriate for people who are significantly overweight, and if your skin is not reasonably elastic you may not achieve the same results as younger people with tighter skin.

Good candidates for liposuction also have reasonable expectations about the results they can expect. They understand that while liposuction can enhance one's appearance and improve self-confidence it will not change one's life.

Good candidates also know that liposuction is not a treatment for obesity. The fat cells removed by this process are, indeed, removed permanently. However if a person eats unwisely and gains weight, fat may be deposited in other areas.

Preparing for surgery

At your initial consultation, your surgeon will assess your suitability for liposuction, taking into account your general health, where your fat deposits lie, how much fat needs to be removed and the elasticity of your skin. Based on these considerations, he'll discuss the specifics of the appropriate treatment and make sure you understand exactly what will be done.

- Your consultation is the time for you to tell your surgeon exactly what you hope to achieve by having the procedure so he can advise you as to whether your expectations can be met.
- Depending on your goals, your surgeon may suggest an alternate procedure or recommend more than one liposuction session.

Evaluating risks

Liposuction is a trusted and safe procedure that has been performed for many years. However, as with all surgery, there are complications that can occur.

- Bleeding is very rare and can be easily treated.
- Infection, which is usually superficial, can be addressed with antibiotics.
- Asymmetry can result if too much fat is removed from one side. Irregularities can be seen or felt especially in superficial liposuction, and mild cases may take up to six months to subside. Asymmetry can be difficult to correct, however methods like lipo shifting or fat transfer can improve the condition.
- Some patients experience delayed healing of the incision sites. However, as the incisions are usually very small this is not of major concern.
- Skin loss is extremely rare and occurs only in situations where abdominoplasty and liposuction have been combined.
- Perforation or injury to major organs has been reported in situations where the surgeon is inexperienced or the patient has a condition that makes him or her a poor candidate for liposuction. Our practice has performed liposuction for 25 years without an incident of this kind.
- As with all surgery, there is the risk of complications from anaesthesia. To guard against this, we regularly check the health of our patients prior to surgery.

Understanding your procedure

How long a liposuction procedure takes depends on several things, including the size of the area being treated, the amount of fat being removed, the number of areas treated and the type of anaesthesia used.

- If the area to be treated is small, you may be given a local anaesthetic to numb the area, along with an intravenous sedative to help you feel relaxed.

- Some patients prefer general anaesthesia, particularly if a large volume of fat is being removed, the area being treated is near the face or the liposuction is being done in combination with another procedure, for example treatment of the male breast.

Liposuction has become increasingly safe and is done more frequently under local anaesthetic since the adoption of the Tumescant technique. With this technique, the area to be treated is first injected with a dilute solution of an anaesthetic called Lidocaine and a drug called Epinephrine that constricts blood vessels. The solution causes the area to become firm, or tumescent.

Once the anaesthetic has taken effect, a narrow tube called a cannula is inserted through a tiny incision and used to vacuum out fat deposits deep beneath the skin.

After your surgery, you will likely experience some fluid drainage from the incision, as well as some bruising, swelling and discomfort. These symptoms are temporary and depend on the extent and location of the area treated.

- To control swelling and help your skin shrink to fit its new contours, you will be fitted with a snug elastic garment to wear over the treated area.
- Your surgeon will also prescribe antibiotics to prevent infection.

Recovering from surgery

Healing is a gradual process, however you will begin to feel better after about a week or two and should be able to go back to work within a few days of your surgery.

- Your surgeon will advise you to start walking around as soon as possible after surgery to reduce swelling and help prevent blood clots forming in your legs. However you will need to avoid strenuous activity for about a month.
- Most swelling and bruising will disappear within three weeks but some swelling may remain for as much as six months or more.
- There will be no stitches to be removed.

You will begin to notice a definite difference in the shape of your body soon after your surgery, and that improvement will become even more noticeable over the next four to six weeks as any swelling subsides. After about three months, any persistent mild swelling will usually disappear and you will be able to see your final contour.

If your expectations were realistic, you should be very pleased with the results of your surgery. Clothes of all kinds will fit more comfortably and you'll feel better about your body. Eating a healthy diet and getting regular exercise will help you maintain your new, more attractive shape.