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Sucking out fat

Removing unseemly fat from the body should be strictly carried out under the expert hands of doctors.

By Dr A. ANANDA DORAI

WHILE definitely not a replacement for a healthy diet and regular exercise, modern-day liposuction surgery (sometimes referred to as liposculpturing) can safely address those hard-to-lose fatty deposits that simply don't respond to diet and exercise, creating big improvements in body contour and shape.

For some of us, certain areas of the body are "immune" to the effects of exercise. No matter how many miles we run, sit-ups we do, weights we lift, or laps we swim, the fat remains, unless it is removed – with liposuction.

Liposuction is appropriate for large, disproportionate hips, buttocks, thighs, the abdomen and "love handles", as well as fat deposits on arms, back, knees, sides, and under the chin.

Very often, many different areas can be treated during a single operation.

Is liposuction safe?

Liposuction is a relatively safe surgery when performed within safety limits. Even large volume liposuctions have been performed safely without complications.

Overweight patients who have localised areas of fat removed must be willing to accept a greater chance of contour irregularities, and less than ideal skin redraping in exchange for improving the way they look in clothing.

What is abdominoplasty?

An abdominoplasty (also known as a tummy tuck) is a popular form of cosmetic surgery for people wishing to regain a flatter abdomen.

Abdominoplasty is designed to flatten the abdomen by removing excess skin and fat, and tightening the muscles of the abdominal wall.

It is an excellent procedure to correct excess abdominal skin, and repair muscle laxity following childbirth, prior surgery, or as a result of significant fluctuations in weight.

A full abdominoplasty is performed under general anaesthesia. The procedure takes three to six hours, depending on the individual patient.

The doctor will make a horizontal incision in the area immediately above the pubic bone. The length and shape of the incision will be determined by the degree of correction necessary.

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Liposuction should be safely performed in a hospital setting by an experienced plastic surgeon.

Surgery begins with a tiny incision inconspicuously located in a natural skin fold or crease in an area to be treated.

Next, a salt water/anaesthetic solution is injected through a micro-cannula.

During surgery, the doctor moves the micro-cannula back and forth under the skin. With the help of a high-pressure suction machine, the unwanted fatty deposits are removed permanently, and the desired shape is created.

After surgery

After surgery, a tight-fitting garment must be worn over the area for several weeks. This will help your skin shrink and conform smoothly to the new shape of your underlying tissue.

You will be up and around in a day or two after surgery, but strenuous activities should be restricted the first week or two.

For several days after surgery, you may experience mild discomfort and stiffness, which can usually be controlled by medication. Some patients experience numbness or discomfort for varying periods of time.

Your scars will be barely noticeable, and will soon seem to disappear.

If you had skin dimpling (cellulite) before surgery, you will still have it afterward, but it may be somewhat improved.

Expect some swelling and bruising, which will subside within a few months.

Sometimes, the skin may have an uneven or slightly rippled effect. The final body contour after liposuction may take between three to six months to be noticeable. This is due to the swelling in the tissues, and by wearing the garment continuously, the final result will be apparent in the due course of time.

Occasionally, permanent sagging of the skin occurs when the amount of fat removed exceeds the ability of the skin to shrink.

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Excess skin is removed and the weakened abdominal muscles are sutured together, resulting in a smooth, tight abdominal wall.

If necessary, liposuction may be used to achieve the desired correction. A small incision around the navel will be necessary to re-position the belly button.

You may be considered a good candidate for an abdominoplasty if you are physically healthy and your weight is stable.

Patients considering abdominoplasty should have realistic expectations regarding the outcome of their surgery.

After your surgery, the doctor will apply a dressing to your incision.

You will wear a removable compression garment in order to minimise swelling, while supporting your abdomen, as you recover during the first few weeks.

The doctor may also place a temporary drain tube under the skin to drain any excess fluids that would otherwise collect around the incision.

Typically, patients can return to work after about one to two weeks. However, strenuous activity must be avoided for four to six weeks.

After this time, you should be standing tall and confident with your new slimmer profile.

Your scars will take approximately three to twelve months to fade and flatten.

■ *Dr A. Ananda Dorai is a consultant plastic and reconstructive surgeon. This article is courtesy of Columbia Asia Hospital. The information provided is for educational and communication purposes only and it should not be construed as personal medical advice. Information published in this article is not intended to replace, supplant or augment a consultation with a health professional regarding the reader's own medical care. The Star does not give any warranty on accuracy, completeness, functionality, usefulness or other assurances as to the content appearing in this column. The Star disclaims all responsibility for any losses, damage to property or personal injury suffered directly or indirectly from reliance on such information.*