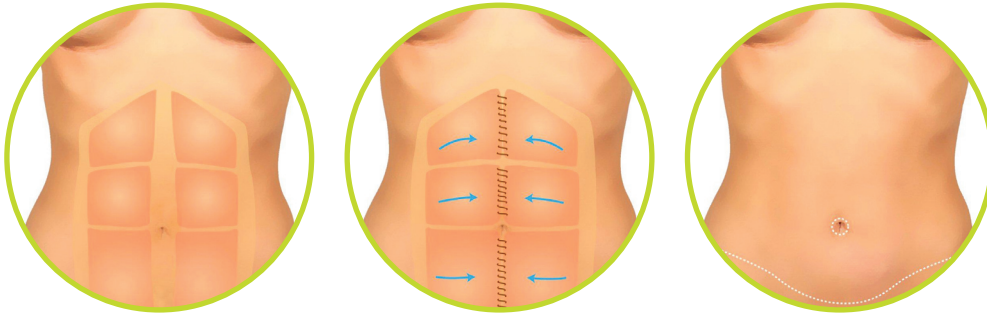


Procedures

Body contouring, including liposuction



What are the issues?

Men and women have a natural tendency to deposit fat in certain areas of their bodies. In addition, some disease processes and their treatments can result in localised fat deposits. In some cases, these unwanted fat deposits may be unsightly and very difficult to shift with exercise and diet alone. Many different operations are available to improve the shape of your body and address excess fat deposits and skin laxity. Your surgeon will help you decide what's right for you.

What are the options?

Body contouring comprises a range of techniques designed to improve the shape of your body:

Liposuction:

The most common body contouring procedure is liposuction (also known as liposculpture or suction-assisted lipectomy - SAL): a technique to remove unwanted fat deposits. We may use liposuction alone or combined with other types of surgery to achieve the desired results.

During the liposuction procedure, we insert a narrow metal tube, connected to a strong vacuum pump, through small incisions in the skin. As we draw the tube back and forth beneath the skin, excess fat is slowly sucked out. The process removes tunnels of fat leaving the small blood vessels and nerves intact. As with all surgical procedures, there are some minor variations of the basic techniques.

Prior to fat removal, we inject the area to be treated with a dilute solution of saline containing local anaesthetic and adrenaline. This helps improve the effectiveness of the procedure while reducing blood loss and improving post-operative discomfort.

The operation is usually performed under general anaesthesia, especially if we are treating extensive areas. Occasionally though, smaller areas can be managed under local anaesthetic.

Skin-Tightening Surgery:

Excessive skin laxity cannot be improved with liposuction, although young patients may be able to 'soak up' some excess skin over time following weight loss or liposuction. In most cases where your skin is lax or hangs down, your surgeon will recommend a skin-tightening procedure that removes both skin and fat, improving the body contour but leaving a scar. This type of operation is more commonly required if you have lost a large amount of weight or your skin is loose as can occur following pregnancy or as we age.

In patients with excess skin that is unlikely to be soaked up in time, we remove the lax skin together with the underlying fat. This process will, however, leave a scar. In most cases, the majority of the scar will be hidden in the natural folds and creases of the body. For example, a tummy tuck is the most common form of skin-tightening surgery, which leaves a long scar across the lower tummy that can be hidden beneath underwear. We can also tighten the skin in other areas of the body such as the upper arms, around the inner thighs, across the chest and, in some cases, around the back.

In some circumstances, we may combine skin-tightening procedures with limited liposuction. We do not regard extensive liposuction combined with skin-tightening procedures as safe, as it may excessively damage the skin's blood supply.

Most skin tightening procedures require a general anaesthetic. Suction drains may also be used and you may be in hospital for one or two nights following the procedure.

Which procedure is right for me?

Body-contouring surgery does not improve your health but can enhance your self confidence, so that you are happy with your body image. If you are considering liposuction or a tummy tuck for example, it's important to have a clear idea of what aspects of your appearance you don't like so that your surgeon can plan your surgery to target these problems.

For liposuction, the most common scenario is that there are areas of fat excess which cannot be altered by dieting or exercise. These may be in the hip area ('saddle bags'), in the inner thighs, around the buttocks, the tummy wall, or involve the upper arms or neck. It is important that you are as specific as possible when describing your concerns to your surgeon. If your problem is more generalised and you are significantly overweight, then to get the best results, you should only consider liposuction after you have lost weight.

We commonly perform skin-tightening surgery in patients who have achieved significant weight loss and who now have areas of skin excess. Tummy tucks are best performed when your family is complete and all types of body contouring procedures deliver the best results when your weight is stable and as close to normal as possible.

What can the procedures achieve?

Liposuction:

Liposuction is very effective for removing localised areas of fat. The areas of the body most commonly treated are the thighs, abdomen, back and the male breast.

It was believed that fat cells are not regenerated in adults; however, this may not be the case. Although liposuction does remove many fat cells, the remaining cells can still swell with further fat deposition. Therefore, weight gain in the future can reverse the effects of your surgery. Liposuction is a good operation for localised areas of fat excess. It is not a good operation to achieve generalised weight loss and is not a substitute for a healthy lifestyle.

Liposuction can, with certain limitations, be used at the same time as other procedures such as a tummy tuck or breast uplift to improve the overall shape of the body.

Skin-Tightening Surgery:

By removing loose or flabby skin, the shape of the body can be improved and tightened. The effects are long lasting if combined with a healthy lifestyle and careful weight control.

What are the limitations?

Liposuction and skin-tightening surgery are not treatments for obesity.

If you are planning to lose weight, you should do so before considering body contouring surgery. The best results are achieved when your weight is stable and approaching normal.

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Liposuction:

There is a limit to how much fat you can remove at one time and from one part of the body. Although we can repeat liposuction, it may not be possible to slim down as much as you would like.

Loose or inelastic skin may not respond well to liposuction and your surgeon may recommend a skin-tightening procedure either in addition to, or instead of, liposuction. Liposuction will not improve dimples and wrinkles of the skin, sometimes called cellulite.

Skin Tightening Surgery:

There is a limit to how much excess skin we can remove and how tight we can make your skin. The operation will not restore your skin's elasticity although it will make the skin tighter. This type of surgery often leaves scars that can be quite long and which may stretch or become uneven.

What are the risks?

With an experienced surgeon, most patients do not suffer any major difficulties following body-contouring surgery.

Bleeding can occur with any operation. If you are taking aspirin or another anti-inflammatory medicine, it may be a good idea to discontinue these for several weeks before the operation. You should discuss this with your surgeon and GP. Bruising and swelling are common after surgery, especially following liposuction. Both will settle as you recover from your operation.

Occasionally bleeding can occur after surgery that can result in a collection of blood under the skin. This is called a haematoma. Your surgeon may need to take you back to the operating theatre to deal with this problem by removing the haematoma and sealing up any leaking blood vessels. This may necessitate a further general anaesthetic. Conversely, a seroma is a simple fluid collection which can be treated in the clinic by simple aspiration with a needle.

We may need to treat minor infections with a short course of antibiotics. Complications relating to the wound such as skin breakdown are uncommon and rarely serious.

Sometimes, minor issues such as areas of localised swelling, irregularity or bumps at either end of the scar detract from the cosmetic outcome; we may recommend further surgery to deal with these problems.

After skin-tightening surgery, scars will inevitably remain. These usually become pale and white with time, but very occasionally, a hard, red, elevated scar may need further treatment to improve its appearance.

Skin sensation may be altered by skin-tightening surgery or liposuction. Most often, this numbness or hypersensitivity improves with time but this is not always the case.

If you are undergoing surgery to both sides of your body, we will plan the procedure carefully to give the best chance of symmetry. However, one side of the body may respond better than the other and you may occasionally notice differences between the two sides. Your surgeon may recommend additional treatment if this is the case.

What can I expect afterwards?

Liposuction

Swelling and bruising

It may take six months for all of the swelling to subside. There can be considerable bruising in the treated areas which can be uncomfortable for a week or two. Wearing a pressure garment can help reduce the swelling and quicken recovery.

Pain and numbness

It is normal to experience some pain while you recover and we will offer you appropriate painkillers.

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Scars

You will have small scars where the suction tube was inserted. These are normally well hidden.

Getting back to normal

You may only need to take a few days off work to recover from minor liposuction, although it may take longer for larger areas. Bruising may persist for some time and you may be prescribed iron tablets to combat potential anaemia.

Skin-Tightening Surgery

Your recovery will depend on the extent of the surgery. The larger the area treated, the longer it will take to recover. You should discuss this with your surgeon before scheduling the procedure.

Dressings, sutures and drainage tubes

Most commonly, your stitches will be dissolvable and do not need to be removed. Your wound will be dressed to keep it clean and your dressings may need to be changed as you recover. Your surgeon may have placed drainage tubes to remove excess fluid. The nurses usually remove these drains before you are discharged from hospital.

Pain, swelling and numbness

It is normal to experience some pain after your operation and painkillers may be prescribed. As with other procedures, the area treated is likely to be swollen for some time and you may experience some numbness or hypersensitivity. Both of these conditions should return to normal after a short time.

Scars

You will have permanent scars after skin-tightening surgery. You will have discussed the location and extent of these scars in the outpatient clinic before surgery. Nevertheless, we make every attempt to place the scars where they are least noticeable and to keep them as short as possible.

Getting back to normal

If you try doing too much too quickly, you can slow down the healing process. Your recovery period will depend on the extent of your surgery. For liposuction, you should give yourself two or three weeks before resuming light activities and wait six weeks before resuming any strenuous exercise.

Contact Us

For information and appointments please contact us and we will be happy to help.

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