

What is liposuction?

Liposuction is an operation to improve the shape of your body. It involves using a cannula (thin, hollow tube) attached to a suction device to remove fat from under your skin.

Your surgeon will assess you and tell you if liposuction is suitable for you. However, it is your decision to go ahead with the operation or not.

This document will give you information about the benefits and risks to help you to make an informed decision. If you have any questions that this document does not answer, ask your surgeon or the healthcare team.

Is liposuction suitable for me?

Your surgeon will carry out a detailed assessment before deciding if surgery is suitable for you. This may include taking photos for your medical records and asking you questions about your medical history.

Your surgeon will check if you are the right weight for your height. If you are overweight, it may be better to lose weight by improving your diet and doing more exercise. Liposuction is not a substitute for losing weight.

Your surgeon will examine your body. You are most likely to benefit from liposuction if, after losing a lot of weight, you still have localised deposits of fat that seem out of proportion to the rest of your body. These usually affect areas such as your hips, sides, abdomen or thighs.

Liposuction may also be suitable if you have growths of fat that show as lumps under your skin or differences in shape following a breast reduction or abdominoplasty ('tummy tuck'). For the operation to be successful, your skin should still be elastic (stretchable).

Let your surgeon know if you are pregnant or planning to become pregnant in the future. Pregnancy can change the appearance of your body and may affect the long-term results of surgery.

What are the benefits of surgery?

Your body should have a better shape.

Most people who have a successful operation are more comfortable with their appearance and are able to wear better fitting clothing.

Are there any alternatives to surgery?

Improving your diet and doing more exercise can reduce localised fat deposits. It may be possible to inject a solution that dissolves the fat.

However, this technique is new, the long-term complications are not known and the cosmetic result may not be as effective as liposuction.

What will happen if I decide not to have the operation?

Liposuction will not improve your physical health. The appearance of your body will stay the same. Your surgeon may be able to recommend an alternative to improve the shape of your body.

What does the operation involve?

The healthcare team will carry out a number of checks to make sure you have the operation you came in for. You can help by confirming to your surgeon and the healthcare team your name and the operation you are having.

The operation is performed either under a general anaesthetic or under a local anaesthetic, depending on how many areas need to be treated.

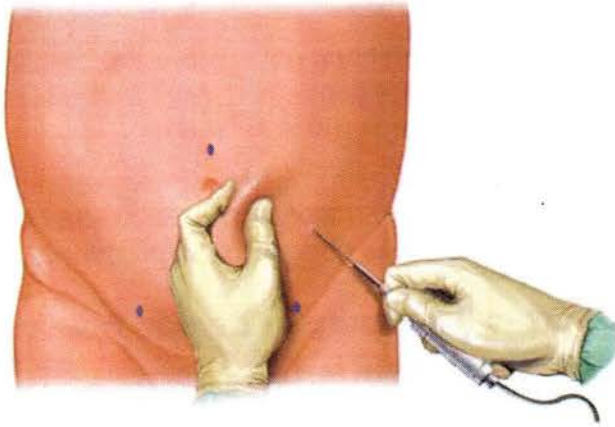
Your surgeon will inject each area to be treated with a local anaesthetic, fluid and adrenaline. This reduces bleeding and discomfort after the operation.

You may be given antibiotics during the operation to reduce the risk of infection.

The operation usually takes 45 minutes to 3 hours, depending on how many areas need to be treated.

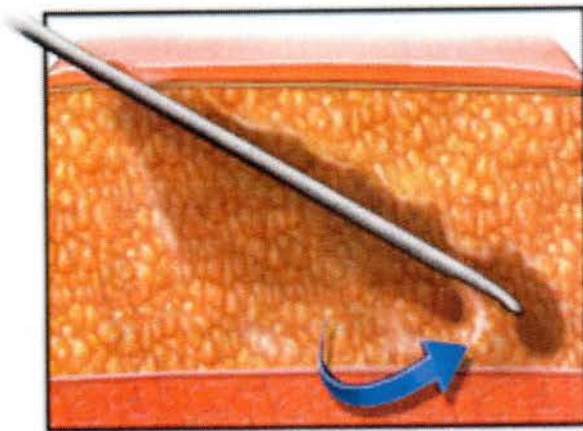
For each area to be treated, your surgeon will make several small cuts. They will insert the cannula through a cut and into the fat.

They will usually move the cannula backwards and forwards through the fat to break up the fat, making it easier to suction out. Some cannulas use high frequency ultrasound to break up the fat.



Liposuction

Your surgeon will move the cannula at different angles so the fat is removed as evenly as possible.



The cannula in the fat

Your surgeon will close the cuts with stitches or tape. They will place a compression garment or dressing over the area to help reduce swelling and improve the cosmetic result.

What should I do about my medication?

Make sure your healthcare team knows about all the medication you take and follow their advice. This includes all blood-thinning medication as well as herbal and complementary remedies, dietary supplements, and medication you can buy over the counter.

What can I do to help make the operation a success?

If you smoke, stopping smoking now may reduce your risk of developing complications and will improve your long-term health.

Try to maintain a healthy weight. You have a higher risk of developing complications if you are overweight. Regular exercise should help to prepare you for the operation, help you to recover and improve your long-term health. Before you start exercising, ask the healthcare team or your GP for advice.

You can reduce your risk of infection in a surgical wound.

- In the week before the operation, do not shave or wax the area where a cut is likely to be made.
- Try to have a bath or shower either the day before or on the day of the operation.
- Keep warm around the time of the operation. Let the healthcare team know if you feel cold.

What complications can happen?

The healthcare team will try to reduce the risk of complications.

Any numbers which relate to risk are from studies of people who have had this operation. Your doctor may be able to tell you if the risk of a complication is higher or lower for you.

Some complications can be serious and can even cause death.

You should ask your doctor if there is anything you do not understand.

Your anaesthetist will be able to discuss with you the possible complications of having an anaesthetic.

General complications of any operation

- Pain is usually only mild and easily controlled with simple painkillers such as paracetamol. The areas that are treated can be uncomfortable for a few weeks.
- Bleeding during or soon after the operation. Rarely, you will need a blood transfusion or another operation. Any bruising usually settles within 2 weeks.

- Infection of the surgical site (wound). It is usually safe to shower after 2 days but you should check with the healthcare team. Let the healthcare team know if you get a high temperature, notice pus in your wound, or if your wound becomes red, sore or painful. An infection usually settles with antibiotics but you may need another operation.
- Blood clot in your leg (deep-vein thrombosis – DVT). This can cause pain, swelling or redness in your leg, or the veins near the surface of your leg to appear larger than normal. The healthcare team will assess your risk. They will encourage you to get out of bed soon after the operation and may give you injections, medication, or special stockings to wear. Let the healthcare team know straightaway if you think you might have a DVT.
- Blood clot in your lung (pulmonary embolus), if a blood clot moves through your bloodstream to your lungs. Let the healthcare team know straightaway if you become short of breath, feel pain in your chest or upper back, or if you cough up blood. If you are at home, call an ambulance or go immediately to your nearest Emergency department.

Specific complications of this operation

- Skin burns caused either by friction when your surgeon moves the cannula or by heat if your surgeon uses a high frequency ultrasound cannula. The burns are usually mild and settle with time.
- Injury to small nerves that supply your skin when the cannula is passed through the fat. This can cause numbness, a feeling of 'pins and needles' when the area is touched (paraesthesia) or hypersensitivity. These problems usually settle within a few weeks but you may need medication to help with hypersensitivity.
- Fat embolus. The procedure can sometimes cause fat to enter your bloodstream and move to your lungs, making it difficult for you to breathe.
- Damage to structures such as your bowel, kidneys or liver. The risk is higher if you have deep scars in the area that is treated.
- Developing a collection of fluid (seroma) under your skin where fat is removed (risk: 1 in 30). This is not usually serious and settles with time. Sometimes the fluid needs to be removed using a needle.

- Irregular body shape where fat has been removed, if your surgeon removes too little or too much fat. You may need more liposuction, or fat grafting, where fat from another area is injected under your skin.
- Loose or droopy skin, if your skin does not shrink back enough after the fat has been removed.
- Changes to skin colour caused by bleeding or wearing compression garments. The risk is higher if your inner thigh is treated.
- Circulation problems, if the operation causes too much fluid to move around your body.

How soon will I recover?

In hospital

After the operation you will be transferred to the recovery area and then to the ward. In the hours after the operation your body will fill the spaces where the fat used to be with fluid (oedema). It can take several weeks for this fluid to be reabsorbed.

You should be able to go home the same day or the day after, depending on how many areas were treated. However, your doctor may recommend that you stay a little longer.

If you do go home the same day, a responsible adult should take you home in a car or taxi and stay with you for at least 24 hours. Be near a telephone in case of an emergency.

If you are worried about anything, in hospital or at home, contact the healthcare team. They should be able to reassure you or identify and treat any complications.

Returning to normal activities

Do not drive, operate machinery or do any potentially dangerous activities (this includes cooking) for at least 24 hours and not until you have fully recovered feeling, movement and co-ordination. If you had a general anaesthetic or sedation, you should also not sign legal documents or drink alcohol for at least 24 hours.

To reduce the risk of a blood clot, make sure you carefully follow the instructions of the healthcare team if you have been given medication or need to wear special stockings.

Rest for a few days and do only light activities. This will help the fluid to be reabsorbed.

The bandages over the cuts will be removed after a few days. Continue with the compression clothes or dressings for a few weeks.

You should be able to return to work after 2 to 3 days, depending on how many areas were treated and your type of work. You should be able to do a limited amount of activity, such as lifting young children, after about a week. Do not lift anything heavy or do strenuous exercise, such as vacuuming or ironing, for 4 weeks.

The healthcare team will advise you on exercising to help keep you to a healthy weight and to improve the cosmetic result.

Do not drive until you are confident about controlling your vehicle and always check your insurance policy and with your doctor.

The future

The healthcare team will arrange for you to come back to the clinic regularly to check on your progress. Your new body shape will usually take several months to appear as the fluid is reabsorbed and your skin tightens. The best results for you will happen if you keep to a healthy weight and exercise regularly.

Summary

Liposuction is an operation to improve the shape of your body. You should consider the options carefully and have realistic expectations about the results.

Surgery is usually safe and effective but complications can happen. You need to know about them to help you to make an informed decision about surgery. Knowing about them will also help to detect and treat any problems early.

Keep this information document. Use it to help you if you need to talk to the healthcare team.

Acknowledgements

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