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LIPOSUCTION AND LIPOSCULPTURE ULTRASONIC ASSISTED LIPECTOMY

These refer to surgical techniques in use for about the last 20 years, that are improving year by year. They are not primarily designed for obese patients, but essentially for people with abnormal regional fat distribution or local fat deposits: in other words restricted rolls of fat that do not respond to dietary slimming efforts.

The common sites for local fat deposits include the haunches, buttocks, the inside of the thighs and knees, wing-like rolls from the middle of the back, a "hump" at the base of the neck, the neck itself, the back of the arms (making them heavy and pendulous), the ankles, the abdomen, and the breasts (even in men).

Modern techniques include infiltration of a very dilute solution of a substance to cause constriction of blood vessels in the fat to be removed. This helps disintegrate the fat, and makes it easier to aspirate by a suction pump, after the surgeon further breaks down the fat mechanically.

The latest advances involve the use of ultrasound or vibrating probes (rather like those used by the dentist to remove plaque) to dissolve fat into an oily emulsion that can be easily aspirated with a minimum of mechanical effort. They can be used in certain cases, and in others older mechanical probes are used more effectively. Only an experienced surgeon can decide the best indication for each of these techniques, depending on the type of fat and overlying skin.

To reduce the risk of bruising after the operation, the surgeon usually puts in drains, sometimes connected to suction, then a compression dressing in the form of stockings, panties, abdominal bandages, or whatever is needed in a given site. Some form of compression dressing may be needed for some weeks to help remould the skin on the new body silhouette.

Sometimes additional care is needed, such as physiotherapy using dedicated skin toning apparatus or manual lymphatic drainage.

Complications are relatively rare. The skin often remains a little indurated for some weeks, or even months, but this can be improved by the measures cited above. Special medication may also be required in some cases. The skin may also become a little darker than usual, due to persistent slight bruising. This usually disappears rapidly in blonde patients, but may remain longer in brunettes. Application of vitamin A cream is useful.

Liposculpture operations have a high success rate. This explains why some non-specialists have adopted the technique, without the necessary surgical skills. As a warning, you must remember that, after all, this is a surgical operation that is evolving rapidly with modern advances in technique. These are more efficient, but in the wrong hands can be dangerous. You must avoid non-specialists for these operations. You will see publicity from unqualified practitioners, but remember that only qualified plastic, cosmetic and reconstructive surgeons can give adequate guarantees.

However, also remember that even in the most expert hands, any cosmetic surgery of the silhouette may fail to give an ideal result, or the hoped-for outcome for the patient. In such cases it is usually possible to make further minor corrections, usually as a day-patient under local anaesthesia or mild sedation.

A general principle is that any patient wishing to modify his or her silhouette should first consult their general medical practitioner and a dietetician. It is better to resolve weight problems by diet or a change of life style, such as more sporting activity, before contemplating surgery, that can only correct local fat deposits, as described above.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G.F. Maillard', with a stylized, flowing script.

Dr G.-F.Maillard, Privat-Dozent