ASK THE DOCTOR:
Is Liposuction a Good Way to Get Rid of Fat?  By LAUREL HOSTETLER

Sometimes no matter how much you diet or exercise, your body can stubbornly cling to fat in certain areas. Maybe it’s that pooch under your belly button that just won’t go away since you had kids. Or perhaps you’re relatively lean except for a pair of love handles you can’t get rid of no matter what you do. Could liposuction be the answer to your stubborn body fat issues? We interviewed Dr. Gaurav K. Goswami, M.D., of the Precise Care Clinic to find out.

Dr. Goswami, what is liposuction?
Dr. G: Liposuction is a surgical technique which removes excess fat from specific regions of your body to create a slimmer, more attractive body shape. During the procedure, fat is sucked out from the area being treated.

But isn’t surgery a bad way to lose fat?
Dr. G: Yes, it is. Liposuction is not weight loss surgery. This is one of the first things patients must understand. If your goal is to lose fat, I would not suggest this procedure. Liposuction is best for body contouring and getting rid of localized pockets of stubborn fat.

Who are the best candidates for liposuction?
Dr. G: Liposuction is ideally suited to someone who is in relatively good health and has a fairly regular diet and exercise schedule but wants to have a little more shape to his or her body.

What parts of the body can be treated?
Dr. G: With the newer and safer techniques now available, virtually any area can be suctioned. Some of the most common areas include the tummy, upper and lower back, love handles, arms, inner and outer thighs, gluteal area, and chin.

How about men? Can they benefit too?
Dr. G: Absolutely. Liposuction is a great solution for men looking to get rid of exercise-resistant fat. While some of the most popular treatment areas for men include the neck, abdomen and love handles, as I mentioned before almost any area of the body can be suctioned. In fact, liposuction is particularly useful for the reduction of male breasts, known as Gynaecomastia, which previously could only be addressed with open surgery.

Is it safe?
Dr. G: Yes. In recent years, newer techniques have made liposuction safer, easier and less painful. It can be safely done under local anesthesia—with the patient virtually awake for the entire procedure—and performed in the privacy of a doctor’s office. However, the safety of the procedure does depend upon the selection of the patient, how much fat is being removed and the technique being employed. Your doctor will cover any particular concerns during your consultation.

How much fat can be removed?
Dr. G: The volume depends upon the patient’s physiology and area being treated, but it is safe to remove two to three liters of fat in one given sitting. Risk of complications may increase if excessive amounts of fat were to be removed at one sitting.
How is the procedure done?

Dr. G: Essentially the procedure is done in three steps. The first step is marking the skin over the target area where fat needs to be removed. Then photographs are taken so that both the patient and doctor are in agreement on the extent of area to be targeted. The second step is infiltration of the target area fat with a local anesthetic solution causing the targeted area to become tumescent, or swollen and firm, known as Tumescent Liposuction. This provides not only anesthesia but also helps break down the fat to be removed. And the third step is suction, where the broken down fat cells are sucked out with a thin tube, called a cannula.

Are there different types of liposuction?

Dr. G: There are several different techniques available to break down fat (the second step of the procedure) and this technique can vary by doctor. Smart or Slim Lipo employs a laser device to break down the fat cells prior to suctioning them. With Vaser Lipo, ultrasound waves are used to break down the fat and liquefy it before suctioning. Other names floating around are Tickle Lipo, which claims to use infrasonic energy, and Body Tite, which applies radiofrequency energy. Basically these techniques employ heat and mechanical activity to break down fat. The majority of these techniques are still fairly new and evolving.

When no source of energy is utilized to break down the fat it is called MicroCannular Liposuction. It is one of the most tried and tested method of performing liposuction. The targeted fat is removed with the tiniest of cannulas, hence the name Microcannular Liposuction. The microcannula relies on tactile feedback, which provides doctors with the greatest amount of control. Results are smoother and more uniform. This is where the art and science of performing liposuction come together. Another term you may hear is Hi-Definition Liposuction, where doctors can sculpt the body to imitate the look of a six-pack, give you washboard abs or make your legs look toned and defined.

Will the procedure cause any scarring?

Dr. G: Since the size of the cannula is so small, the entire procedure is done through tiny skin holes and no stitches are required. After the procedure the entry sites are barely visible and they heal completely within few weeks.

What can I expect during recovery?

Dr. G: During recovery there can be leakage of fluid and fat from skin entry sites, but most of the drainage stops after the first 48 hours. Compression garments help prevent buildup of fluid in the treated area.

When will I be able to return to normal activities?

Dr. G: Usually I suggest taking it easy for two to three days following the procedure, mostly because of the drainage. After that, most patients can return to normal activities. Heavy lifting or exercise should be avoided for about a week.

How soon will I see results post treatment?

Dr. G: After the procedure, there will be some initial swelling and reshaping of the area. But in about two months, the results should be evident.

Is it very expensive?

Dr. G: Actually, no. Because the procedure can be done under local anesthesia and in an office setting, it is quite affordable for a lot of people. The price depends upon the treatment area and the patient’s expectations, but generally a single procedure costs around $3,000.

Will the results be permanent?

Dr. G: Yes. That is why liposuction has stood the test of time as a procedure. By nature, our fat cells do not multiply after our teen years but they can increase in size from the size of the peanut to the size of a baseball. As long as the patient continues to follow a healthy diet and exercise, the results are permanent.

Is there anything else I should know?

Dr. G: Liposuction continues to evolve and there have been some exciting new developments. Now fat can be removed from the belly and transferred to the breasts as a more natural form of breast enhancement. And fat is an excellent source of stem cells and may help to regenerate cartilage. These stem cells can then be injected into the joints for the treatment of arthritis. These are just a few recent developments that still need more research, but if you are considering liposuction you may want to look into storing some of those vital stem cells!