

# A Patient's Guide to Liposuction

**What is liposuction?** Liposuction is a surgical procedure that was designed in the 1970s by an Italian Surgeon specifically to remove small areas of fat that were out of proportion with the rest of a person's body. The first areas to be treated for liposuction were the hips and thighs. However, over the ensuing years, many American Surgeons added refinements to the technique expanding its areas of use to include almost any part of the body where a small amount of fat makes someone look out of proportion. Areas commonly treated by liposuction now include the belly, arms, hips and thighs, flanks and back, and double-chin.

The newer refinements in this technique have allowed it to be done very safely as an outpatient. People now experience less pain, less swelling, less bruising and faster recovery periods. Because the newer instruments used are much smaller than they used to be, only tiny incisions are needed. These are usually closed with 1 or 2 dissolvable stitches and covered with a band-aid.

## Who Is A Good Candidate For Liposuction?

**Liposuction is not a weight loss technique.** Liposuction is not for the obese patient who is seeking weight loss and a total re-shaping of the body. Liposuction is designed to treat certain areas such as the abdomen, hips and flanks that are out of proportion to the rest and hence bring it back into proportion. For people who are obese or planning to lose weight, best results are achieved by using liposuction as a "touch up" tool after weight loss. One does not have to be exactly at your goal weight to have this procedure, but the results are consistently better if you are near normal weight.

So someone who is a good candidate for liposuction is someone who is not obese. It is for someone who has good skin tone. By that I mean not a lot of excess skin in the area to be treated and thicker skin that will contract after the procedure. If your skin already has the small dimples called cellulite, liposuction will not take these away. After your liposuction procedure you will have less volume in that area and your body contour will be better. However, cellulite is not taken away by liposuction. Also, this is for someone who has very realistic expectations. If one is overweight, they are not instantly going to become a swimsuit model just because they have liposuction!

The condition of the skin over the area to be treated with liposuction is very important in achieving the desired results. As we age, generally at approximately age 55-60, our skin

thins and loses much of its contracting ability. Thus it may not “shrink” after the procedure as much as necessary to achieve a smooth, tight result. Although liposuction can still be done after this age, many times the skin will not tighten on its own as much as we would desire, and one can be left with loose skin and wrinkles. Be sure to ask your Surgeon about the possibility of this based on your skin tone in the areas to be treated. The amount of excess skin you have before surgery and the amount of fat to be removed also must be taken into consideration.

At times, liposuction is best combined with a skin removal procedure in order to alleviate the problem of loose, excess skin after surgery. During your consultation, your Surgeon should discuss the issue of excess skin and make recommendations if he or she feels that this could be problematic. If your Plastic Surgeon does not mention skin issues during your consultation, be sure to ask. Don’t just assume that there is no possibility of skin looseness and contour irregularities just because it was not mentioned.

### **Exactly How Is Liposuction Done?**

After you and your Surgeon have had the consultation you will set a date for the procedure. On the day of surgery, you will meet with your Surgeon at the Surgery Center or office-based operating room. He or she will do special drawings on the area(s) to be treated with liposuction. These markings are usually done with you standing up. Although this can be very embarrassing, remember that your Surgeon has seen this many times before.

After you have the necessary markings done for the procedure, you will usually meet with the Anesthesiologist or nurse anesthetist who will be helping. There are options for anesthesia depending on the areas being treated, the amount of fat to be removed and the preference of your surgeon and you. Be sure to ask about this and discuss all options. Sometimes, for smaller areas, all that is necessary is some local anesthesia like Lidocaine (Novacaine). At other times to keep you comfortable it may be necessary to give you some sedation or a light general anesthetic.

Once you are in the operating room, the areas to be worked on are “prepped” with a surgical disinfectant scrub. This is done to minimize the number of bacteria on your skin and greatly reduce the risk of infection afterwards. When the prep is done, sterile drapes and towels are placed around the area so that there is no contamination.

Most liposuction techniques require the injection of a special fluid into the treatment areas and that is done at this time. The clear liquid is called Tumescent Fluid and it consists of I.V. fluid, Lidocaine, and epinephrine. This allows for easier fat removal, numbs the area, and reduces bruising and swelling afterwards. It is placed into the region using a long, thin needle. If you are having the procedure done awake, it is this part of the operation that you may feel. However, the sensation is not really painful and numbness sets in very quickly.

After the areas are prepped and infused with the tumescent fluid, small incisions are made to allow for the entry of the liposuction tools. These instruments are called “cannula” and are only about 2 to 3 millimeters in diameter. The use of these smaller instruments is one of the refinements that allows liposuction to be done much more comfortably and with faster recovery times than in the past. The Surgeon puts the cannula under the skin and turns on the suction machine. He or she then moves the instrument back and forth across the treatment area removing fat as it goes. This is repeated over and over again until the desired contour has been achieved.

There is nothing that tells the Surgeon when enough fat has been removed except experience. It is possible to take out too much fat and it is possible not to take out enough. A well trained Surgeon who has done many of these procedures will give you the best results. Be sure and ask how many of these your Surgeon has done when you are in the consultation.

### **Which type of liposuction is best?**

There are many different types of liposuction instruments on the market today and these are called by different names. Some common names that you will hear include Smart Lipo, laser liposuction, Vaser liposuction, ultrasonic liposuction, Cool lipo, Cool sculpting and the traditional tumescent liposuction. In reality, all of these are only a slight variant of the traditional tumescent liposuction. Companies have trademarked their specific instrument and they advertise the name in an attempt to create demand for it. Always remember, **the name of the tool being used is not nearly as important as the skill and the experience of the person who is doing the procedure.** One should make sure that you are going to an experienced cosmetic surgeon who has done training in liposuction and has performed many of these cases in the past. It is more important for you to be comfortable with the experience and training of your surgeon than it is to seek a certain brand name of instrument being used to perform the procedure.

### **Who should perform the liposuction surgery?**

It is critical that you check the credentials of the surgeon and make sure that he or she is board certified and has years of experience in performing liposuction. There are different types of physicians performing this today. Most liposuction in the United States is performed by Plastic Surgeons. However, in many States dermatologists, general surgeons and even OB/GYN’s are permitted to perform liposuction. Some States place no restrictions at all on who can perform liposuction so that anyone with an M.D. or D.O. degree could be offering this to patients even if they are not properly trained to do so. One should always inquire as to the training of the surgeon you are seeing and make sure that you are comfortable with his or her credentials and experience. Only the American Board of Plastic Surgery can certify a fully trained Plastic Surgeon. Look for these credentials and if you don’t find them - then ask.

### **In what type of facility should liposuction be done?**

This is a critical question that we touched on earlier. Most liposuction is done as an outpatient in the United States today. That is, the person comes into a surgery center or operating suite, has the liposuction performed, and goes home the same day. Many times the surgeon will perform these in an accredited outpatient surgery center, which in my opinion, is the safest place to have this procedure done for a variety of reasons. An anesthesiologist is present to ensure your comfort and safety, and also the operating room is maintained as a clean sterile environment according to national standards.

However, many surgeons have their own surgery center adjoining their office space. Many of these are also accredited and maintain national standards. They may have board-certified anesthesiologists present and hence are also a very good and safe option for patients who are seeking liposuction. If your surgeon suggests that your procedure be done in an office space surgery suite, there are several questions that you should have answered. First, is this an accredited surgery suite? Second, is there an anesthesiologist present to ensure your comfort and safety? And finally, does your surgeon have privileges to perform this procedure or take care of potential complications in a local hospital or outpatient surgery center? When these questions are answered to your satisfaction, you should feel more comfortable in proceeding with the procedure.

### **What to do before surgery?**

There are several things that most surgeons will want their patients to do prior to surgery. First is to avoid any of the blood-thinning medications that would cause excess bleeding and swelling after the procedure. These most commonly include aspirin, vitamin E, omega 3 or fish oil supplements, and many other herbal supplements that you may be taking. It is very important to give your surgeon a **complete** list of the medicines, vitamins, supplements and any other health or fitness drinks or food that you are eating to ensure that you are not taking something that might prolong the recovery process after liposuction is completed. You may be asked to stop certain medications before the procedure. Be sure to ask your Surgeon when you can start them again.

Make sure someone is available to drive you home after the procedure. If sedation or a light general anesthetic was used, you cannot legally drive. Also, you want to make sure that you have enough time off work and enough help with chores around the house. All this needs to be discussed with your surgeon prior to having liposuction so that you can make the proper arrangements that will allow you adequate recovery time.

### **What to avoid before surgery.**

Do not attempt to radically alter your weight in one direction or another right before the procedure. I tell all of my patients I want them at the time of surgery to be at the weight

that they can comfortably maintain and allow me to deal with the rest. The wrong thing to do is to starve one's self to lose those last 20 pounds, only to gain them again after liposuction surgery has been completed. These starvation diets put you at an un-maintainable weight for your body. You will only gain weight back again after liposuction and possibly compromise the results.

Conversely, one should not gain weight intentionally prior to the liposuction surgery either. After surgery, it is important to maintain a stable weight so that one does not harm the results. We recommend a sensible regimen of exercise with a healthy diet in order to maintain the results that have been achieved by liposuction. If you can maintain your weight stable, then the results are permanent.

What happens if you do gain weight after liposuction? It certainly is possible to put weight back on in areas treated by liposuction. However, as a rule, you will put more weight on in the areas that have not had liposuction. Many of the fat cells have been removed by liposuction in the treated areas and your body does not have the ability to re-grow these cells. Once they are removed, they are gone forever. Some fat cells are always left in place after liposuction and these cells can get bigger with weight gain. However, most weight gain goes to areas that have all of their fat cells intact. This is why it is important to maintain your weight after liposuction. Weight gain is the most common reason why someone may not be happy with the long-term liposuction results.

### **Recovery after liposuction surgery.**

Be sure to follow the recovery instructions given to you by your Surgeon. After liposuction, one sees some of the results immediately. However, because of swelling and the time it takes for the skin to contract around its new size and shape, you do not see all of the results immediately. For most people, it will be 3-4 months after the procedure until you are seeing 100% of the results. In people who have had a large volume removed, it might be 6 months before you see your final result.

Recovery times can only be generalized because each individual case is unique. Your recovery is influenced by your age, overall health, and type of procedure performed. For higher volume liposuction, full recovery will take longer than for smaller areas. If there are other surgical procedures done at the same time as liposuction, this will also influence your recovery.

Initially after liposuction you can expect to have bruising and swelling in the areas. Your skin may feel a little numb and it will ache. The aching afterwards feels like bruised area. It is not terribly painful, but you do know something was done. In addition, you will feel "lumps and bumps" in the treated areas because the swelling is not even. These go away as the swelling subsides.

Most people are able to shower the next day after liposuction. Although strenuous activity and exercise are restricted immediately after liposuction, many people are able to start

back to light exercise in a few days to weeks. Also, time off work is minimal. For those who have a desk job, many are back to work in under a week. If your job is physically demanding, it may be a few weeks before you can go back to full duty. Be sure to ask your surgeon about all activity restrictions after your procedure because this is different for each individual.

Your Surgeon will probably have you wear special compression garments after liposuction. These are worn for a few weeks to a few months depending upon your procedure and the amount of fat removed. It is important to wear these afterwards. For the first few days after liposuction, the compression garments keep swelling and bruising to a minimum. For the first few weeks afterwards they hold the skin down to its new position, help it heal there, and actually help the skin contract. Make sure you discuss compression garments after liposuction with your Surgeon. This is a vital part of the operation that actually does contribute to your overall final results. And hence, you must follow the instructions of your Surgeon closely for optimal healing and optimal liposuction results.

Again, it will be several months before you are seeing 100% of the results, although you do look smaller immediately after surgery. Most Plastic Surgeons will do “before” and “after” pictures of the areas treated with liposuction. They may also do pictures as you are healing. This is the best way to follow your progress and judge the final results.

### **Potential complications of liposuction.**

Fortunately, in trained hands, liposuction is a very safe procedure with few potential complications. However, as with any surgical procedure there is the possibility of complications and this needs to be discussed with your Surgeon beforehand. There is a general discussion of complications here but the risks are unique for each individual because of health factors and the specific procedures being done.

The most common complication after liposuction is irregularity in the contour of the area treated. This may look like persistent bumps or dimples in the skin. The area might not look or feel smooth to the touch. These may subside over time or they might be noticeable enough to require a small touch-up procedure. National statistics show that approximately 10% of liposuction patients have some unevenness and some contour irregularities in the areas treated.

The next most common complication, are as discussed earlier, is loose skin in the area that does not contract completely or sufficiently after liposuction. Sometimes this can be predicted beforehand, but sometimes it cannot. If there is loose skin causing wrinkles after several months that has not yet contracted, one may desire to have some of this removed in a separate surgical procedure. This second procedure will help the results be as tight and smooth as possible.

Other complications include infection after surgery. The risk of infection should be less than one-percent if the procedure is done in a clean operating room environment. Most

people are given antibiotics at the time of surgery, and this also reduces the risk of infection. If you were to have an infection, it generally happens in the first few days after the procedure. The area would appear red and sometimes warm to the touch. Sometimes there can be a slight discharge from the small incision used for the liposuction. This is readily treatable by antibiotic pills. However, it should be brought to the attention of your surgeon immediately if you suspect that this is what has happened.

Bruising is part of the procedure but this can vary greatly between individuals. Most people will have some visible bruising afterwards. Severe bruising and discoloration should be brought to the attention of your Surgeon. Usually, the bruising is gone after 2 weeks. Some Plastic Surgeons have patients use medicine to help alleviate the bruising faster. In addition, it is very common for the areas treated with liposuction to be initially numb to the touch. Normal sensation almost always returns but just like full recovery, it can take several months.

At the beginning, we talked about how to find a qualified plastic surgeon. Here at the end, I am putting a downloadable link that will allow you to print out a guide to questions you should ask at the time of a consultation for this or any plastic surgery procedure to make sure that you have a qualified plastic surgeon. This guide is called “Beautiful by Choice”, and it can be downloaded at [www.ohioplasticsurgeons.com](http://www.ohioplasticsurgeons.com). Or you may print the version that begins on the next page. Also at that website, you may contact me personally through email with any questions you have. I personally answer all of my emails and would be happy to answer any questions you have about liposuction or other plastic surgery procedures.

Thank you.

Steven L. Robinson M.D., F.A.C.S.

# **BEAUTIFUL BY CHOICE**

**The guide to finding a qualified Plastic Surgeon**

Download and print this booklet.

Take it with you for your Plastic Surgery consultation

Fill in the blanks and make the best choice for you

Steven Robinson, M.D., F.A.C.S.

Ohio Plastic Surgeons, Inc.

## **Ckeck-List For Finding The Right Plastic Surgeon**

1. Is your Surgeon board certified by The American Board of Plastic Surgery (ABPS)?

This is the only board recognized as having the authority to certify Plastic Surgeons in America. The certification process is rigorous and involves completing an accredited training program, then passing oral and written examinations. You can easily contact the ABPS and ask if a surgeon is board certified by calling (215) 587-9322 or visiting [www.abplsurg.org](http://www.abplsurg.org).

Board certified? YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

2. Is Your Surgeon a Member Of The American Society For Aesthetic Plastic Surgery? (ASAPS)

Membership in this prestigious society means that your surgeon is a board certified Plastic Surgeon who has been recognized by his or her peers as having significant experience in Cosmetic Plastic Surgery. Through this society's meetings we continue the lifelong commitment to learning. ASAPS membership is by invitation only. To make sure your Surgeon is a member you may call ASAPS at (888) 272-7711 or visit the website at [www.surgery.org](http://www.surgery.org).

Member of ASAPS? YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

3. Does Your Surgeon Have Local Hospital Privileges?

Regardless of which Surgery Center or office- based procedure room your surgeon operates in, he or she should have privileges at a local hospital to do the same procedure. This ensures that they could manage any potential complications that may arise. Call the hospital and ask for the "Medical Staff Office" to inquire about privileges.

Hospital privileges? YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

4. Surgical Facility.

Where is your operation to be done? For safety purposes procedures involving anesthesia should only be done in accredited facilities such as outpatient surgery centers or hospitals. Always ask your surgeon where the procedure will be done and check by calling that facility about their accreditation.

Name of Surgical Facility \_\_\_\_\_

Accredited Facility? YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

5. Thoroughness

After your initial consultation you should feel that your surgeon has been very thorough in asking questions about your goals, actually listening to your answers, examining the areas involved, and discussing options. If you do not feel you have all your questions answered you should have a second consultation or get a second opinion from another Plastic Surgeon.

My Surgeon was thorough YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

6. Do You Have All The Details?

Before surgery your surgeon should discuss all the details of your operation. What is your procedure(s) called? What type of anesthesia will you get and who is giving it? What is the total cost of the procedure including operating room, surgeon's fee, and anesthesia?

I can answer these questions YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

## **YOUR INITIAL PLASTIC SURGERY CONSULTATION**

1. It is usually best to describe the problem(s) you would like corrected to your Plastic Surgeon and then let the Surgeon suggest options and procedure(s) to improve upon the problem area(s). Take a moment to write down what you would like to have corrected.

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2. What procedure(s) did the Surgeon suggest to you for achieving your goals?

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3. Are there any other surgical options available that would also meet your needs?

4. How many of these procedures has your surgeon done? \_\_\_\_\_

5. How often does your Surgeon do these procedures? \_\_\_\_\_

6. What are the possible risks associated with this procedure?

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7. Recovery period

How much time off work? \_\_\_\_\_

What restrictions on activities? \_\_\_\_\_

How many follow-up visits and when? \_\_\_\_\_

When can I drive a car? \_\_\_\_\_

How long until I am completely healed? \_\_\_\_\_

8. What pain pills will I be given after surgery? \_\_\_\_\_

9. Do I need to get prescriptions filled before surgery? \_\_\_\_\_

10. What is the Surgeon's policy on revisions? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

11. What is the **total** cost for the surgery?

Surgeon's fee \_\_\_\_\_

Operating room \_\_\_\_\_

Anesthesia \_\_\_\_\_

Any other \_\_\_\_\_

Total cost \_\_\_\_\_

**Finally,**

After your consultation you should feel like you have a good rapport with your Surgeon. You should feel that he or she listened to your concerns and really understands your goals.

Before agreeing to the surgery, ask yourself these questions –

Am I comfortable with the experience of this Surgeon?

Did the office staff make me feel at ease?

Do I feel like I can ask questions of the Surgeon and staff?

If the answer to any of these questions is “no” you should schedule a second consultation before surgery or seek a second opinion with another Surgeon.

By following this outline before surgery you are maximizing your chances of having your expectations met and being happy with the final outcome.

Wishing you all the best. Congratulations on being “**Beautiful By Choice**”

Sincerely,

Steven Robinson, M.D., F.A.C.S.  
Ohio Plastic Surgeons, Inc.  
[www.ohioplasticsurgeons.com](http://www.ohioplasticsurgeons.com)