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LIPOSUCTION

The procedure

Liposuction involves the permanent removal of areas of fat. It is a body contouring procedure, not a weight-loss procedure and usually addresses stubborn areas of fat that are hard to shift, despite exercise and a healthy diet. Common areas for liposuction include the waist (love handles), the abdomen, the hips (saddle bags) and the thighs. Other areas in which liposuction may be used include the neck, knees, back, chin and buttocks.

What does it involve?

Liposuction is usually performed under general anaesthetic (with you asleep), but may also be performed under local anaesthetic (with you awake) for small areas. Liposuction is performed through tiny incisions and a thin metal cannula is inserted to vacuum the fat layer that lies beneath the skin. The fat layer is initially broken up by infiltrating a special fluid mixture. Depending upon the estimated amount of fat to be removed, it may either be done as a day case procedure (in and out of hospital the same day) or with you staying in hospital.

What are the benefits?

Liposuction improves the contours of your body. After removing areas of fat it leaves behind an empty area of loose skin which then contracts and tightens over the next 8 weeks to 6 months. Optimum benefits are seen in younger people.

How long does the surgery take?

The length of surgery depends upon the volume of fat that is to be removed. It may take between 1-3 hours.

What is the recovery period?

Initially there will be pain and bruising in the area of liposuction (this may last up to 4 weeks), and you may have some straw-coloured fluid oozing from the wounds in the first week or so. You will need to wear a supportive compression garment for 8 weeks following the surgery to ensure there is compression at the sites of fat removal. Most people will be able to return to work at 1-2 weeks following surgery, but you may need longer if larger volumes have

been removed. Any discomfort and pain may be relieved with REGULAR pain killers (paracetamol or brufen). You are encouraged to gently walk after the operation.

How long before daily activities may be resumed?

Strenuous activity should be avoided for at least 2-weeks. You may be able to drive from 48-72 hours after surgery, but remember that you need to be comfortable in performing an emergency stop or similar manoeuvre.

What are the success rates?

Liposuction has a high success rate.

What are the possible complications?

Some people can feel dizzy after the procedure, which usually settles with rest and fluid intake. The swelling may take many weeks to settle down. Under or over-correction may occur: if an area is under-corrected it may be possible to redo the liposuction, but a period of several months after the first operation may need to elapse to allow the internal scarring and swelling to settle down. Most small contour irregularities will settle but sometimes further surgery is required. Skin excess can also occur. Other complications include infection and bleeding, both of which are fortunately unusual with liposuction. Deep vein thrombosis (DVT) and pulmonary embolus (PE) are blood clots that may occur in the leg (DVT) and travel to the lung (PE) which may be very serious – fortunately they are uncommon in liposuction. Thrombophlebitis (inflammation of vessels) is a less serious but nuisance problem. A rare, but dangerous complication is the damage to internal organs by the liposuction instrument. If this were to happen, further surgery may be required to explore and repair the organs damaged.

Warning: Smoking increases the chances of suffering from complications significantly and will preclude the surgery from taking place.