



Liposuction

Liposuction (also known as liposculpting) is used to remove fat and contour areas of the body where it is difficult to lose fat through diet and exercise. It can be very effective in sculpting and defining these difficult areas.

Indications for liposuction

- Abdominal contouring
- Hip and flank contouring
- Back contouring
- Arm contouring
- Thigh, knee and ankle contouring
- Gynaecomastia (male breast enlargement) correction
- Submental (under chin) fat removal
- Breast reduction (in specific cases) and axillary/chest wall reduction
- Lipoma (fatty tumour) removal

Limitations of liposuction

- Liposuction is not a weight loss procedure. It is a body contouring procedure best carried out when you are at a stable weight with no planned changes in your weight.
- Liposuction removes fat from underneath the skin and relies on the skin “snapping back” to give a smooth contour. If too much fat is removed or there is poor skin quality or tone, then the skin may not snap back enough and there may be loose skin in the area after liposuction.
- If you have preexisting loose skin in the area you wish to have liposuction in, liposuction alone will not give the best result. In this situation combining liposuction with another procedure eg abdominoplasty or tummy-tuck in the abdomen or having the abdominoplasty instead of the liposuction will be recommended. (The specific procedure recommended will vary depending on the location and your individual situation.)
- Liposuction does not treat internal fat. It removes the fat underneath the skin but will not remove fat deeper in the body e.g. within the abdominal cavity. If this is suspected to be a limiting factor in your case, Ms Nugent will advise you of this after your assessment.
- There is a limit to how much liposuction can be performed in one sitting for safety reasons. This amount will vary depending on the circumstances but Ms Nugent will always put your safety first when planning surgery.
- Liposuction will not remove cellulite, stretch marks or scars

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Procedure details

Pre and post surgery clinical photographs of the treated areas will be taken. Liposuction is carried out through very small incisions where fluid is infiltrated and then a suction cannula is used to remove the fat. A narrow metal tube (suction cannula) attached to a suction pump is inserted through the very small skin incisions and used to remove the unwanted fat by moving it through the area to be treated under the skin. Most surgeons inject a local anaesthetic and adrenaline solution beforehand to help reduce pain and bleeding.

It has the advantage of having very small scars and of being very effective in removing subcutaneous tissue. It does rely somewhat on the ability of the skin to snap back and this is something that varies from individual to individual and lessens with age.

Power or suction assisted liposuction is normally used. For very small areas, hand held syringes may be used. Variations of liposuction utilise ultrasound or laser to assist in breaking down and removing the fat.

Liposuction can be carried out under local anaesthetic (while you are awake) or general anaesthetic (while you are asleep) depending on the extent of the surgery planned and your wishes.

Depending on the extent of surgery, you may be able to go home the same day or after one night in hospital.

Combination surgery

Liposuction is often combined with other procedures to give the best possible results for those procedures. Some common combinations include:

- Liposuction and abdominoplasty
- Liposuction and open correction of gynaecomastia
- Facelift and submental (under chin) liposuction
- Liposuction and thigh lift
- Liposuction and breast reduction
- Liposuction and brachioplasty (arm lift)

Post-operative course

You will have bruising and swelling in the treated area afterwards which will peak at day 2 to 3 and slowly resolve over the weeks following this. Most of this will go in the next 4 to 6 weeks but swelling can persist for up to 6 months especially in areas such as the ankles. You will have small scars in the areas the suction cannulae have been inserted and you often have some temporary numbness of the overlying skin. Some fluid may ooze from these areas in the beginning.

You will need to wear a compression garment for 4 to 6 weeks postoperatively. This helps to provide support to the skin and to keep swelling controlled.

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Recovery

Most people return to work between 5 and 14 days depending on the extent of the liposuction and the nature of their work. Light activities can be resumed within 2 weeks and normal activities are usually unrestricted after 4 to 6 weeks.

Complications

While most liposuction surgeries go very smoothly and patients are delighted with the results, as with any procedure there are some risks associated with liposuction.

- Swelling and bruising. This will peak around day 2 to 3 post surgery and will gradually reduce after that. Most of the swelling is usually gone by 6 weeks but occasionally lasts longer than expected.
- Bleeding. If you have a tendency to bruise or bleed easily or take medications such as aspirin that make you more prone to bleeding, this may be a higher risk for you. It may be necessary to stop some medications in advance of surgery. Occasionally there is more bleeding than expected from the incisions or bleeding under the skin forming a haematoma. Rarely a return to theatre or the procedure room is needed to deal with this. In this situation it may be necessary to make a larger incision to control the bleeding.
- Infection. Infection rates are low in liposuction surgery. If an infection occurs, you will be treated with antibiotics and rarely a return to theatre or the procedure room is needed to washout or further treat the wound.
- Slow healing/poor scars. Liposuction incisions are small and usually heal very quickly and well but occasionally take longer than expected particularly if infection or bleeding has occurred. Occasionally the scars heal in a poorer condition than expected and are red, raised or lumpy.
- Asymmetry. No-one is perfectly symmetrical and we all have differences between the two sides of our body. These differences persist after surgery but are usually small enough that they are not overly visible and do not require any treatment. Occasionally further treatment is required to address a significant asymmetry following liposuction surgery.
- Loose skin. The skin may fail to snap back especially if a large amount of fat is removed. If this fails to settle, it is only corrected by skin excision procedures e.g. in the abdomen, an abdominoplasty or tummy tuck procedure.
- Stretch marks and scars will not be removed by liposuction.
- Contour irregularities.
- Clots in the legs (deep vein thrombosis) can form due to the length of surgery and reduced mobility after the procedure. They can sometimes travel to the lung (Pulmonary embolus (PE)) and this can be very serious. While in hospital, you will receive blood-thinning injections and be asked to wear compression stockings. You should continue to wear the stockings for 2 weeks after discharge from hospital.
- Numbness or hypersensitivity of the overlying skin due to bruising or damage to the small nerves of the skin. This is usually temporary but may persist. The skin can also feel hard postoperatively. This too should soften with time.
- Under or overcorrection.

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- Fat embolism. This is a very rare complication of liposuction where fat can enter the blood stream and travel to other sites in the body. If this is to the lungs, it can have very serious implications.
- Specific to abdominal liposuction - the rare but serious complication of perforation of the abdominal wall, which can lead to internal organ such as bowel or bladder damage. While this is extremely rare, it can be serious and would require treatment with antibiotics and in a worst case scenario a further procedure by a general surgeon to correct this.
- Too extensive a procedure. When fat and fluid are removed, your body reacts by sending fluid from your circulation to the area. If too large an amount is removed this can lead to low blood pressure and the need for intravenous fluid support. For this reason most surgeons limit the amount of fat that they will remove in one procedure. This is a very rare occurrence as Ms Nugent will have planned your surgery with your safety and well-being at the forefront of her mind.
- Disappointment with the result. Sometimes after undergoing a liposuction procedure, patients are disappointed with the result. This may be due to one of the problems described above occurring or due to unrealistic expectations of the surgery e.g. mild asymmetries, some residual fatty tissue or less than expected definition of the liposuctioned area. It is important that you discuss your expectations in advance of the surgery so that you can understand what to expect from the surgery and so this situation is avoided as much as possible. (Additional costs may be incurred for further procedures.)

Longevity of procedure

Liposuction surgery has a high success rate and is considered an excellent procedure for contouring the body.

The fat cells that are removed during liposuction are permanently removed. However the remaining fat cells can increase or decrease in size if you gain or lose weight. It is important to realise that if you gain weight after liposuction, you can regain it in the areas treated by liposuction as before or in a slightly different pattern of weight gain than before. This is why liposuction is best viewed as a body contouring rather than a weight loss procedure and best performed when you are at a stable weight with no further weight changes planned. The change to your body contour should therefore last.

The natural ageing process of the body also continues regardless of surgery and so may over time alter your body shape.

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