

BODY CONTOURING

BODY CONTOURING IS A BROAD TERM that refers to altering and improving the shape of the body. Many parts of the body can be contoured, ranging from the neck, to the breasts, abdomen and flanks, arms and thighs, and buttocks.

Body contouring surgery commonly refers to removing fat either alone, or together with tightening the overlying skin by removing excess loose skin. These surgical methods give more significant and predictable outcomes, even though they may be associated with some down time.

The abdomen, trunk, thighs, buttocks and arms are common areas where excess fat accumulates. Fat in these areas can be removed using liposuction alone, provided the skin of the area is of good elastic quality. Modern techniques utilize ultrasound energy or water jets to emulsify or break up fat, to enable fat removal with less bleeding and hence less postoperative bruising. However, if there is excess loose and stretched-out skin in addition to fat, some skin will have to be removed together with fat to optimize the body contour and prevent the appearance of saggy, hanging skin after the fat is removed.

An example of this is a post-pregnancy belly. A tummy tuck is a procedure in which excess loose skin and fat are removed, together with repairing the muscles of the abdomen which are stretched apart during pregnancy. A tummy tuck will improve the bulge of the belly, and remove the overhanging skin with stretch marks, giving a more flattering flat belly. Individuals who have lost massive amounts of weight may also have a similar problem of excess hanging skin and fat in the arms, belly and thighs, which have to be excised (cut away). Although this results in long scars, there is no other way to improve very loose, hanging and saggy skin. Milder degrees of skin laxity can be tightened with non-surgical methods like Thermage.

Breast size and shape are important aspects of a woman's body contour that can be enhanced through surgery. Breast augmentation is a popular procedure to enhance the size of

the breasts. Predictable results can be achieved using breast implants; more recently, there is the option of using fat from one's own body and transferring it to increase breast size. However, women need to be aware that the use of fat will give a smaller volume augmentation; larger volumes will necessitate a second procedure. The proviso is that there needs to be sufficient fat on the body that can be harvested for transfer.

Some women have the opposite problem of breasts that are too large and heavy. Aside from being disproportionately large on the upper body, physical problems such as neck, shoulder and back aches can develop and worsen with time. In such cases, breast reduction surgery can improve the physical symptoms, and make their breast size more proportionate.

Some men are also embarrassed by excess fat or tissue on their chest giving them the appearance of "breasts". This condition is called gynaecomastia. A more masculine chest contour can be achieved with liposuction, although in some cases, there is a small amount of breast tissue that needs to be 'cut' out.

The neck is an area that can accumulate fat as we age. This, together with loss of skin elasticity, contributes to the appearance of a "double chin" and a shorter neck. Ultrasound-assisted liposuction will remove the fat and tighten the skin to define the neck contour, improving the shape and length of the neck. If the problem is predominantly due to skin laxity, non-surgical methods like Thermage will help to tighten the skin and improve the neckline without surgery. In more severe cases, a neck lift may be required.

Depending on the patient, and the area or areas of concern, one or multiple procedures may be required, and these may be done at a single session, or over several sessions. They may also be combined with non-surgical procedures to enhance outcomes. It is important to note that to get optimal and long-lasting results from body contouring procedures, it is important to adopt a healthy lifestyle, incorporating a sensible diet and regular exercise. ■



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