

health&nutrition

Under the *knife*

Opting for a nip 'n' tuck is the ultimate life-changing decision. Eva-Maria Bobbert has the nitty-gritty details of weight-loss surgery

So you've done all the right things to ditch those extra kilos – eat right, exercise regularly – but you still can't shift that fat? Well, thanks to modern surgical techniques, there are other options – but don't expect it to be a walk in the park.

If you're considering surgery, read on – this is one decision in life that needs to be well informed.

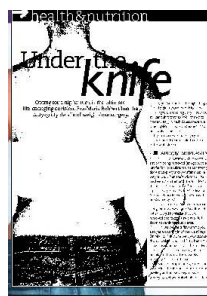
ABDOMINOPLASTY

What is it? A tummy tuck involves fat and skin being removed (as opposed to just fat for liposculpture). It's commonly done post-pregnancy or after massive weight loss, when the abdominal wall has been stretched and there's a loss of skin elasticity, explains Dr Ben Norris, a plastic surgeon at Sydney's Silkwood Medical. 'Basically, everything below the bellybutton goes.'

What's involved? An incision is made along the underwear line (you'll be left with a scar). The skin and fat are removed and excess tissue is pulled down towards the pubic area.

Results: 'As well as a flat tummy, you also get a cinching in of the waist,' says Dr Norris. 'If it's done well, your stomach should look shaped and flat when sitting as well as standing – that's the real test.'

Downtime: Up to three nights in hospital and two to three weeks' recovery. You'll need to wear a supportive compression garment for six weeks after the procedure to reduce swelling and bruising. Expect your tummy to feel uncomfortable for a few



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days and high-impact exercise (tennis and golf) is off the cards for six weeks.
Costs: From \$6,000, not including the anaesthetist or hospital costs.

ABDOMINAL LIPOSCULPTURE

What is it? Fat is sucked from the tummy to create a sleeker silhouette. Best for definition, not weight loss. Less than five litres of fat is removed.

What's involved? Small incisions are made around the groin and bellybutton. A metal cannula attached to a vacuum device is inserted to 'pump out' the fat.

Downtime: Take a few days off and wear compression garments for six weeks to help with swelling and bruising. Some patients experience a mild sunburn-like sensation. 'That's because the metal cannula touches the nerves that run from the muscle up to the skin. The nerves become bruised and send odd messages back to the brain,' explains Dr Norris. It takes six weeks to three months to see final results.

Costs: From \$6,500 including surgeon, hospital and anaesthetist costs.

BOTTOM & THIGH LIPOSCULPTURE

What is it? Collections of fat are removed from the top of the buttocks (so they look less 'squared off'). 'The problem is there is no defining point between your backside and upper thigh, so you might need to consider thigh liposculpture,' says Dr Norris.

What's involved? Fluid is injected into the area to help break down the fat before it is suctioned out through small incisions in the underwear line. 'The fluid also contains pain relief and has vasoconstriction properties to limit bruising,' says Dr Norris.

Downtime: You won't be able to sit down for five days. You'll be sore and will need compression garments to help ease the swelling and bruising. If you've had work on your thighs, it can take up to three months to see the final results.
Costs: Approximately \$6,500 each for

bottom and thigh, including hospital, surgeon and anaesthetist costs.

BUTTOCK LIFT

What is it? It's designed to lift a saggy bottom and remove excess fat and skin. It's for those who have poor skin tone and are no longer eligible for bottom liposculpture alone.

What's involved? An incision is made along the top of the buttocks so that the fat can be suctioned from the upper buttocks. The skin and fat are separated from the buttock muscles and pulled upwards and the remaining tissue is 'anchored' into position at the crest of the pelvis.

Downtime: You'll be in hospital for two to three days and will need two weeks off work. Expect to be popping pain relief pills for a week afterwards.

Costs: From \$7,000.

BREAST REDUCTION

What is it? It's a good option for women who have had large breasts since puberty. If they're having it done post-pregnancy, it's not just about volume but about reshaping the breast for a rounded, more youthful shape,' says Dr Norris.

What's involved? An incision is made around the areola on the breast, volume is removed and the nipple is

THE DOWNSIDE...

There's always a risk of complications, from fluid collecting under the operated area to serious infections. 'You're at higher risk if you're a heavy smoker or grossly overweight,' says Dr Norris. To get the results you want, find a surgeon who assesses your body as a whole. 'Liposculpture involves a thorough skin assessment. We can remove as much fat as you want but there's no point in that if the skin doesn't retract against your new contour. You'll be disappointed if you're left with saggy skin.'

FINDING THE RIGHT SURGEON...

● If you are having a surgical procedure, make sure your surgeon is a plastic surgeon (cosmetic surgeons do not have the full formal training). Call the ASPS on 1300 367 446 for a list of fully qualified plastic surgeons in your local area or visit www.plasticsurgery.org.au.

● When choosing a surgeon, ask your GP for recommendations and get at least two opinions before you make a final decision.

repositioned. 'I won't do the operation in a patient who has smoked in the last four weeks because there is increased risk associated with blood supply when repositioning the nipple,' says Dr Norris.

Downtime: Take two weeks off work and avoid high-impact activity for six weeks. There is a 5% chance you may not be able to breastfeed afterwards.

Costs: Around \$7,500, after the Medicare rebate.

GASTRIC BANDING

What is it? A silicone band is placed around the top of the stomach.

What's involved? A keyhole incision is made for the band to be inserted. The band is attached to a small 'port' under the skin – by injecting fluid into the port the surgeon can adjust the tightness of the band. The tighter it is, the less time it will take for you to feel full when eating.

Downtime: Around 48 hours. It's not a guaranteed weight-loss solution but avoiding sugary drinks, ice-cream and protein shakes is useful as these pass straight through the gastric band and won't leave you feeling full. There's a risk the band can slip and some patients experience vomiting – eating smaller amounts and only three standard meals a day will help. There's also a risk of deep vein thrombosis (DVT).

Costs: More than \$10,000 (less with private health insurance). **S&H**