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HEALTH
SPECIAL**

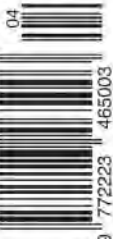
WOMEN OF SUBSTANCE

Asia's Leading Ladies in Healthcare

Female Patients and their Success Stories

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Shaping Up After Weight Loss Surgery

Body contouring, a set of surgical procedures designed to remove excess skin, is generally the only option available to post weight-loss surgery patients.

TEXT: JAMES LEONG

The term “body contouring” has been tossed around in glitzy media campaigns backed by svelte-looking celebrities who promise the treatment will give you the figure you want. But doctors say body contouring is actually a type of reconstructive surgery performed by plastic surgeons for patients who have experienced significant weight loss, either through exercise or weight loss surgery (known as bariatric surgery).

Dr. Leo Kah Woon, consultant at the Department of Plastic, Reconstruction and Aesthetic Surgery at Singapore General Hospital, explains that the procedure removes excess sagging fat and skin, thereby resulting in a substantial and permanent improvement to the contour of the patient.

Dr. Leo adds that following substantial weight loss (30-40 kg or more), prolonged dieting and exercise can lead to further loss of body fat and cause excess skin folds. Contrary to what the exercise industry claims, loose skin cannot be tightened by exercise because skin does not contain muscle, Dr. Leo says.

Untreated skin folds can bring multiple health problems, including maceration of the skin, which can cause bacterial or fungal infections between the folds. Patients may also



PHOTO CREDIT: UCIPLASTICSURGERY.COM

BEFORE AND AFTER A TUMMY TUCK OPERATION

Your Check List

- 1 It's not enough to know that the surgeon is qualified; also ask how many times and how often he has performed the procedure you are interested in.
- 2 Ask for the "before and after" pictures. The quantity of pictures is an indication of the doctor's experience.
- 3 Ask where the surgery will be performed. Patients should check out the facility prior to committing to the surgery to ensure that it is fully equipped to deal with any emergency situations that may occur during the procedure.

experience difficulty when exercising when the skin folds rub against their clothing, leading to abrasion and bleeding.

Dr. Al Aly, president of the Aesthetic Surgery Education and Research Foundation in the US, who will be moving to the Cleveland Clinic in Abu Dhabi, says that the most common body contouring procedure he performs on massive weight loss patients is a "belt lipectomy", which is surgery to get rid of a "hanging apron", or hanging belly.

A circumferential wedge of tissue, which can look similar to a boxing championship belt, is removed from the patient's front, side and back. The procedure requires multiple turns on the operating table and takes about six hours to complete, but the results are fairly dramatic.

Body contouring can also remove excess skin from other areas such as the face, neck, arms, flanks, breasts, and thighs.

The surgery does not come without risks. A Singaporean newspaper recently reported a rise in patients seeking corrective surgeries back home after botched jobs in Korea.

Dr. Aly explains that body contouring after massive weight loss has a high complication rate. The surgery can lead to seroma, or fluid collections, which can also lead to infection. Other risks include general anaesthesia issues, wound healing issues, bleeding, and adverse scarring.

However, there is currently no non-surgical alternative to getting rid of excess skin and fat, Dr. Leo says.

Body contouring can be an expensive option for locals and overseas patients; but because it is considered a medical procedure, payment can be made via Medisave or insurance.

Even after their weight loss, many patients still say they feel traumatised and stigmatised by their previous obesity. When done right, body contouring surgery can help address the emotional baggage that weight loss patients face.

"Most patients are extremely grateful after surgery and some may even show off their bodies in tight-fitting clothes when they used to hide the skin and fat under baggy loose fitting clothes," Dr. Leo says. "Furthermore, these patients are more motivated to maintain their body weight and are less prone to binge eating and wild weight fluctuations."

Dr. Leo says that fat injections can be used to treat patients who look "deflated" after weight loss surgery. So rather than discarding the excess fat during body contouring, this fat can be re-injected into volume deficient areas (such as the upper poles of the breast, face, and buttocks) for a "fuller" look. [GHT](#)

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