

# Body Contouring and Weight Loss

By Don J. Fontana, MD

The battle over the bulge is being won slowly by thoughtful and health conscious men and women. Both men and women are becoming more aware that their success professionally and acceptance in the work place is often influenced by their appearance.

To this end, miracle diets, weight reducing pills and magical exercise equipment have flourished with the hope of achieving weight reduction with as little effort as necessary. Assuming that the individual is medically healthy, the reality of weight loss depends on decreased calorie intake along with increased burning of calories in the form of exercise.

Whatever the mechanism used to reduce one's weight, the question of body contouring following weight loss remains. Since women more frequently face this dilemma than men, the following article is more pertinent to them.

The stereotypical woman with body contouring problems, is the 35 -50 year old who has finished having children and who has had the opportunity to evaluate her figure. She has made the decision that the person she sees in the mirror isn't the person she wants to be. Through careful dieting and in many cases strenuous exercising, her body weight and dress size have been reduced to acceptable levels.

Unfortunately, with this weight reduction certain anatomic areas have not been as accommodating as others. The buttock, "saddle bag" areas and lower abdomen and breasts are the most common areas of concern. Other areas that are frequently addressed are the inner thighs and inner knees, along with loose skin and fat of the upper arms.

The most common question asked of a plastic surgeon is whether the involved areas can be treated by liposuction alone, or with a combination of liposuction and skin removal. The answer is not always clear cut. Generally speaking, if the quality of the skin is good, that is; no stretch marks, supple with good moisture, minimal sun damage, then simple procedures such as liposuction can be very effective.

One must understand that after removing excess fat in any area, the final result is dependent upon the skin's ability to shrink down to the reduced volume. In other words, if the saddlebags are liposuctioned, the excess skin will remain for the first few months and then gradually tighten. This process can take as long as 6-12 months to see a final result.

If a patient exhibits both excess fat and excess, loose skin, then liposuction alone is not appropriate. This situation is most common in the lower abdomen, upper arms and inner thighs. Multiple pregnancies are the prime cause for this condition. Rarely can a woman have more than two pregnancies without developing a significant amount of



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redundant abdominal skin.

Laxity of the upper arms and inner thighs is most frequently associated with weight loss in a formerly overweight individual. Again, surgical excision of the excess skin proves to be the most effective method of treatment giving the best short- and long-term results.

The decision to consider any type of body contouring procedure should not be taken lightly. Be certain to check the qualifications of the treating surgeon. Procedures performed by physicians not trained in plastic surgery may lead to complications. You may contact the American Society of Plastic Surgeons to find a board certified plastic surgeon in your area.

Whatever the body contouring issue, consider a consultation with an experienced board certified plastic surgeon to discuss your options.