

# The *Truth* about Liposuction

Advice from one of the country's leading cosmetic surgeons

BY ADRIENNE PAPP



**D**orian Gray had good reason to hide his horrifying full-length portrait away in a closet. Oscar Wilde's fictional hedonist and murderer swapped his soul to the devil for eternal youth and vigor.

Today an increasing number of people would love to put their full-length mirrors in storage. And not because of the devil. They don't like seeing love handles, bulging abdomens, or double chins—the products of aging, poor nutrition, and lack of exercise.

Medical science has come to the rescue—with more than a quarter-million procedures performed to date; liposuction has become the most popular cosmetic surgery in America.

In this race for aesthetic perfection, the research can be bewildering. Yet finding reliable information is crucial: As the recent death of Donda West, mother of hip-hop artist Kanye West, reminds us, the surgery can be dangerous under the wrong circumstances.

For answers, we turned to one of the country's most recognized specialists and holder of several U.S. patents, Dr. R. Patrick Abergel. He has been featured in major magazines

including *Elle*, *Vogue*, and *W*, and has won awards from the American Heart Association, the Dermatology Foundation, the National Alopecia Areata Foundation, and the American Academy of Cosmetic Surgery.

With over 20 years of experience, the handsome, soft-spoken French native is a diplomate of the American Boards of Cosmetic Surgery, Dermatology and Laser Surgery, and is listed in the Consumer Research Council of America's respected Guide to America's Top Physicians.

## MISCONCEPTIONS

Dr. Abergel points out three key misconceptions: "First, people often think of liposculpture as a weight-loss issue. It is not. The procedure is designed for people who can't trim and tone those pesky bulges, despite their best efforts of diet and exercise."

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Second: Once surgically removed, the fat returns. “That’s not true,” says Abergel. “Fat deposits are both genetic and hormonal, but once removed from a certain area they are permanently gone. Nevertheless, a proper diet must be followed because fat cells can still grow [elsewhere] in the body.”

Third: Large amounts of fat can be removed all at once. “Not so,” he explains. “Safety is the most important factor. The amount of fat removed should be limited to six pounds.” More than that, Abergel cautions, and the patient runs the risk of a complete cardiovascular collapse. He also advocates getting a clean bill of health from a physician before undergoing the surgery.

## SOLUTIONS

The most important step is to find the right surgeon. Not all liposuction practitioners are specialists. “Some doctors take a weekend course and return as a ‘liposuction expert,’” says Abergel. Confirm that a physician is experienced in the field and reputable in the community with good professional credentials. (Dr. Abergel has three different board certifications and a faculty appointment at the University of Southern California.) He suggests checking with a state’s medical board, and strongly believes liposuction should be performed only in an operating room, “not in an office,” to ensure a sterile environment and the monitoring of critical body functions by a physician-anesthesiologist.

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Antibiotics are always administered to prevent infection. Complete anesthesia is less imperative—liposuction can be

performed with or without it—but Dr. Abergel prefers sedation. “With modern anesthesia,” he says, “it’s much more comfortable for the patient and over before you know it.”

Conducted correctly, liposuction is among the safest surgeries because, as Dr. Abergel says, “You work in the fat compartment between the skin and the muscle, outside the organs.” Any bruising and swelling are short-lived and expected. “More serious problems, although extremely infrequent, can include pulmonary embolism, cardiac arrest, and infection,” says Abergel, none of which, he notes, has ever happened in his operating room.

## A DIFFERENT APPROACH

There are numerous methods associated with liposuction. With “Smart Lipo,” a laser is inserted to melt the fat. “It doesn’t have much merit in my eyes. Why needlessly complicate the simple procedure by introducing probes into the body?”

Instead, Dr. Abergel prefers his own method, Liposculpture with ultrasound, which employs smaller, custom-designed instruments. “The incision is very small, trauma to the patient is decreased—less bruising and swelling. It’s faster, the skin is tighter, and the sculpture is artistic—it respects a woman’s shape and form.”

With Liposculpture, there is minimal discomfort, maximum safety, and fast recovery—patients often are back at work or the gym within 24 to 48 hours.

And Dr. Abergel won’t “overdo” it. “What’s important,” he says, “is not what’s removed—it’s what’s left. You have to leave enough so the person looks natural and not ‘done.’”

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