5 Questions to Ask Before Liposuction
Five Questions You Must Ask
Prior to Considering Liposuction

-And Ask in This Order-

1. What type of liposuction procedure(s) do you do and why?

2. If you use a Laser, which laser do you use and why?

3. Do you perform your procedure in an office or is the procedure done in an operating room at a hospital or surgery center?

4. Do you have any patient references that I can call?

5. What are the costs for the procedure?

There is no point in asking how much a doctor charges for a procedure until you know what type of procedure they do. I know you’re dying to know the cost, but get more information before you ask. The only way you can compare one doctor’s costs to another is to ask these questions in this sequence.
1) **What type of liposuction procedure(s) do you do and why?**

There are many types of liposuction procedures. The doctor’s office you consulted may perform one or more types of procedures. It is important that you understand something about the procedure that your doctor will perform. The type of procedure will affect your post-operative recovery, your end results and the cost of the total procedure.

The types of liposuction procedures are listed here:

1. Suction assisted liposuction (Traditional)
2. Power assisted liposuction
3. Ultrasound assisted liposuction (VASER)
4. Laser assisted liposuction (includes SmartLipo, Cool Lipo, SlimLipo, ProLipo)
5. Water assisted liposuction (BodyJet)
6. Tickle Lipo

So let’s talk a little bit about each of these procedures.

Traditional liposuction is also known as suction assisted liposuction. This procedure is usually performed by plastic surgeons in a hospital or surgery center setting. You will probably have general anesthesia which means you are asleep for the procedure. The instruments that are used consist of hollow tubes with some sort of cutting edges on the end of the tubes. These tubes, when hooked to suction, will cut and suck out fat along with skin support structures, as well as pieces of nerves and blood vessels. The cutting of skin support tissues, may leave you skin irregular after all is healed. The injury to nerves could leave you with some loss of sensation in those areas. Blood vessel injury causes excessive bleeding during and after the procedure as well as extensive bruising. Your post-operative course is prolonged due to extensive trauma and pain.
Power assisted liposuction is very similar to suction assisted, the only difference being the doctor is using a suction instrument that is moving back and forth as it sucks. This is felt to be a little less traumatic for you and a little easier work for the doctor. But, for the most part, the same types of problems are associated with this procedure as you just read about with suction assisted liposuction.

Ultrasound assisted liposuction uses vibration to break down the fat cell. The most common ultrasound instrument used by doctors is the VASER, that’s V-A-S-E-R. It is not a laser. Ultrasound assisted liposuction is thorough in its destruction of fat.

The main problem with this procedure is that the instrument generates excessive heat. This heat may burn the skin incision as well as the tissues under skin and rarely, the hot fatty fluid that leaks out can burn the skin adjacent to the incision site. Furthermore, there is a higher risk of seromas after the procedure. Seromas are fluid collections that can form under the skin and may requiring drainage with a needle or via a small incision.

Laser assisted liposuction, which was introduced about 6 years ago, was marketed as a less traumatic alternative to traditional liposuction. The idea was the laser light would destroy the fat cell and that the laser heat would cause skin tightening. The laser beam is very small and therefore difficult to destroy a significant amount of fat cells and the claims of significant skin tightening with this technology has not been substantiated. There are multiple lasers in the marketplace and question number 2 will answer the types in more detail.

The main thing to remember is that most lasers do a very poor job of destroying fat cells and this is due to the very small glass fiber (usually < 1mm in diameter) that delivers the energy to the tissues.

Unfortunately, the excessive heat at that glass fiber tip still makes it very easy to burn tissue and skin. Most importantly, and what few doctors will tell you is, that in order to adequately remove fat in most patients, a doctor has to add suction assisted liposuction to accomplish that goal. Therefore, with most lasers, the “laser” does not really deliver on the hype of less trauma. In reality, laser lipo is just a “high tech alternative” to traditional lipo.
Water assisted Liposuction also known as BodyJet. This product is manufactured in Germany. The basis for this technology is the continuous spraying of anesthetic fluid into the treatment area. Initially, a higher potency of anesthetic fluid is sprayed in a pulsatile fashion into the tissue. Once the areas to of be treated are anesthetized, the potency of the spray is reduced and spraying continues while suction is also applied. The theory is the spray helps to dissect the fat off of supporting structures thereby making it easier to remove the fat.

In reality, the constant spray of fluid creates very wet, soggy tissues that are very hard to evaluate for thoroughness of fat removal. Furthermore, when assessing the amount of fat that is removed with this procedure, the results are disappointing. BodyJet consistently removes less fat than all other methods.

Lastly, there is Tickle Lipo, also known as Nutational Infrasonic Liposculpture. This technology originates from Belgium, in Europe for over 12 years, and now in the US for 4 years. Tickle lipo uses a blunt metal tube that rotates (nutates) and vibrates at a very low frequency (infrasonic vibration) to liquefy or emulsify the fat. Since it uses only blunt instruments, it cannot cut tissues, therefore trauma is significantly reduced. It vibrates at low frequency; therefore no heat is created and won’t burn tissues. Furthermore, the vibration acts to block sensation of pain response back to your brain; this is called a gating mechanism.

To summarize this section, it is safe to say that Tickle Lipo is the most gentle, safest and equally effective form of liposuction in the market today. This is not only my bias, since I have used every form of office-based liposuction available, it also the claim of ALL my patients who have had some other modality elsewhere, prior to experiencing Tickle Lipo. EVERYONE has stated the same thing, Tickle Lipo is the easiest procedure to undergo, easiest procedure to recover from, and the one to show end results quicker.
2) If you use a Laser, which laser do you use and why?

There are many types of laser assisted liposuction machines, many using the exact same wavelength of light. The major laser liposuction technologies are listed here:

1. Smart Lipo
2. ProLipo
3. Cool Lipo
4. Lipolite
5. Lipotherme
6. SlimLipo

SmartLipo was the first laser liposuction unit to come into the marketplace. Cynosure is the company that makes SmartLipo. They did a great job of marketing it and made a big splash in People Magazine and on TV. Patients were asking for it by name. Three laser light wavelengths are currently used by the SmartLipo machine.

The three wavelengths are 1064, 1320 and 1440. None of these wavelengths are specifically absorbed by or kill fat. Most lasers kill fat by heat alone, not the specific wavelength. In fact, prior to SmartLipo becoming a lipo laser in the US, it was a laser that was developed for hair removal in Europe.

The 1320 wavelength is meant for skin tightening. There is a significant amount of heat generated with this wavelength; therefore your doctor will talk about heat sensors for safety. Even with that safety feature, skin burns can still be a problem.

Make sure the SmartLipo machine that your doctor uses, if you choose this practice, has some kind of heat sensing safety feature. Some older units in this class only had the SmartSense,
which is a hand piece that changes the amount of pulses of laser light that doctor delivered dependent on the hand movement of that doctor. This was not the safest way to prevent burns.

The Prolipo by Sciton, has similar wavelengths to that used by the SmartLipo device. Therefore, all the concerns raised above can apply to this machine as well. However, at the time this writing, Prolipo did not have any significant safety features on its machine. Therefore, skin burns are more likely with this machine as compared to SmartLipo. As compared to SmartLipo, there are fewer Prolipo units in use at this time.

CoolLipo is manufactured by Cooltouch. It uses only one wavelength. Unfortunately, the wavelength the company uses is 1320. The 1320 wavelength has a higher risk of skin burns. Furthermore, to my knowledge the company has no internal heat sensing devices for added safety. Not very reassuring information is it?

Furthermore, CoolLipo’s 1320 wavelength has very little effect on fat. This would not be best choice if your primary reason for liposuction is to have fat removed. Your physician will use either suction assisted liposuction or power assisted liposuction to get the job done.

LipoLite by Syneron, is yet another laser. It also uses only one wavelength. LipoLite uses only 1064. The same statements that were made about SmartLipo’s 1064 can also be said about LipoLite. Good for only small areas of fat, otherwise, again, your physician must add suction assisted liposuction or power assisted liposuction to get the job done.

Lipotherme by Osyris is a French company. The laser wavelength that this company uses is 980. This was a new wavelength in the marketplace. Unfortunately, this wavelength has little effect on fat. It is more directed towards water in the skin and therefore helps in skin tightening. It does not seem to be as hazardous as the 1320 when it comes to skin burns.

SlimLipo by Palomar is the last player in the marketplace. It uses two wavelengths as well, but these wavelengths are different from all the other in this space. SlimLipo uses 924 and 975 as their chosen wavelengths. Palomar has studied these wavelengths and filed patents on these specific wavelengths. The 924 wavelength is selective for fat, causing the fat cell to heat up and ooze its contents into the anesthetic fluid. The 975 wavelength is specific for
water, heating these tissues to cause skin tightening without causing a significant chance of skin burns. So, of all lasers platforms in the marketplace, SlimLipo does the best job of destroying fat cells and inducing skin tightening in a very safe environment.

I would strongly recommend that you ask the name of the laser unit that the doctor uses. It is important in your investigation to be as specific as possible.

3) Do you perform your procedure in an office or is the procedure done in an operating room at a hospital or surgery center?

Those physicians that perform their procedures in an Operating Room, either in a hospital or a surgery center will typically use general anesthesia. This means you will be asleep for the procedure. The good news is that you are virtually guaranteed to feel no pain or discomfort during the procedure. The bad news is that once you wake up, the pain will be there and will tend to be worse than the pain from some of the other procedures mentioned in #1.

The procedure of choice in the operating room is suction assisted liposuction, which is traditional liposuction. As I told you above this is a traumatic technique that tends to cut everything in its way. This means not only does the fat come out, but also bits of nerve, blood vessels and skin support structures.

The other problem with doing this procedure in an operating room is that you will be responsible for extra costs. You will have to pay a facility fee (this is the fee the hospital or surgery center will charge for having it done at their “facility”) and an anesthesiology fee (this is the fee the doctor who puts you to sleep will charge). The extra costs can sometimes double the price of the procedure quoted by your physician’s office. The take home message here is make sure you know all the costs that you will be responsible for prior to undergoing this procedure.

If the doctor performs the procedure in an office setting, he or she will use tumescent anesthesia. This anesthesia is given as a fluid that is injected under the skin. This anesthesia keeps you comfortable throughout the rest of the procedure. You are awake for the procedure. When the procedure is done you are able to leave immediately and return home. Tumescent anesthesia is much safer than general anesthesia.
4) Do you have any patient references that I can call and talk to?

Everybody will have some before and after pictures to show you. The problem with these pictures is that these pictures may not be the before and after pictures from that practice. They may be the before and after pictures of another doctor or stock photos from the company whose machine they use perform the liposuction procedure. The practice may not have its own before and after pictures for one of two reasons. They either are not doing a good enough job with their procedure to have good before and after pictures to show, or the patients they see are not allowing their pictures to be viewed by other individuals. A lot of patients have this fear that their before and after pictures will be all over the internet and therefore refuse to have them released for any marketing purposes.

For that reason I suggest that you ask the practice for personal references, references that you can talk to on the phone. In this way, you can be more detailed in your information gathering. You can ask the patient how their total experience was, how they were treated, how and what they felt during the procedure as well as how it felt afterwards. Most importantly ask them how happy they were with their results and would they do it again. This kind of information is often much more enlightening and reassuring than just a set of before and after pictures.

5) What are the costs for the procedure?

Finally!!!

Now that you are armed with all the above information you can ask the question that you were just dying to ask at the beginning. How much? You have decided on the type of liposuction you wish to undergo and whether you want to be awake or asleep during the procedure. If you choose a laser based procedure, you now know what kind of laser your surgeon uses and why. Lastly, you have talked to other patients to assess their experience and results.
Armed with the information you found during your investigation, you can now make a much more educated financial decision. You can finally decide if the procedure, the price and the practice are right for you.

Good luck with your due diligence.

Best wishes on the results of your procedure.

I truly hope you found this information helpful.

Sincerely,

Dr. Z

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