



SAINT JAMES  
HOSPITAL

## **Liposuction Patient Information**

Liposuction is a cosmetic procedure used to remove unwanted body fat.

It involves sucking out small areas of fat that are hard to lose through exercise and a healthy diet. It's carried out on areas of the body where deposits of fat tend to collect, such as the buttocks, hips, thighs and tummy.

The aim is to alter body shape, and the results are generally long-lasting, providing you maintain a healthy weight.

It works best in people who are a normal weight and in areas where the skin is tight.

Liposuction can sometimes be used to treat certain health conditions, such as:

- lymphoedema – a long-term condition that causes swelling in the arms and legs
- lipoedema – a condition where there is an abnormal build-up of fat in the legs, buttocks and thighs

If you're thinking of having liposuction for cosmetic reasons, think very carefully before you go ahead. It can be expensive, the results cannot be guaranteed, and there are risks to consider.

Liposuction is not a treatment for obesity, and it will not remove cellulite or stretch marks.

It's only really suitable for people who have tried changing their lifestyle and found this has not helped.

### **What does Liposuction involve?**

Liposuction is usually carried out under general anaesthetic.

The surgeon would mark on your body the area where fat is to be removed. They would then:

- Inject this area with a solution containing anaesthetic and medicine, to reduce blood loss, bruising and swelling
- Break up the fat cells using high-frequency vibrations, a weak laser pulse, a high-pressure water jet or use suction only
- Make a small incision (cut) and insert a suction tube attached to a vacuum machine (several cuts may need to be made if the area is large)
- Move the suction tube back and forth to loosen the fat and suck it out
- Drain any excess fluid and blood
- Stitch up and cover the treated area

The surgeon will need to know if you are taking any medication that thin the blood such as aspirin, clopidogrel, warfarin or rivaroxaban or medicines that reduce your immunity or ability to heal.

This usually takes 1 to 3 hours. Most people need to stay in hospital overnight, however this depends on the amount of fat to be removed and the technique used.

### **What to expect after the procedure**

After the procedure, you'd be fitted with an elasticated support corset or compression bandages. This helps to reduce swelling and bruising and should be worn constantly for several weeks after the operation or as indicated by surgeon.

You may need to take antibiotics straight after the procedure to reduce the risk of infection. Most people also take mild painkillers to ease any pain and swelling.

If you had a general anaesthetic, someone would need to drive you home and stay with you for the first 24 hours.

How long it will be before you are able to return to work will depend on a number of factors, such as the type of job that you do and how much of your body was treated.

The same will apply to how long it will be before you are able to drive. You should discuss this with your surgeon.

The bandage or corset can be taken off while you shower.

You will need to avoid strenuous activity for up to 6 weeks (but walking and general movement should be fine).

The results of the procedure are not always noticeable until the swelling has gone down. It can take up to 6 months for the area to settle completely.

After about a week: Stitches would be removed (unless you had dissolvable stitches).

At around 6 weeks: You should be able to resume any contact sports or strenuous activities you'd normally do or as discussed with your surgeon.

### **What can I expect after Liposuction?**

It's common after liposuction to have:

- Bruising and swelling, which may last up to 6 months
- Numbness, which should improve in 6 to 8 weeks, however may never go away completely
- Scars
- Inflammation of the treated area, or the veins underneath
- Fluid coming from the cuts
- Collection of fluid in the areas of liposuction
- Swollen ankles (if the legs or ankles are treated)

### **What can happen after Liposuction?**

Liposuction can occasionally result in:

- Lumpy and uneven results
- Bleeding under the skin (haematoma)
- Persistent numbness that can last for months
- Changes in skin colour in the treated area
- A build-up of fluid in the lungs (pulmonary oedema) from the fluid injected into the body
- A blood clot in the lungs (pulmonary embolism)
- Damage to internal organs during the procedure

Any type of operation also carries a small risk of:

- Excessive bleeding
- Developing a blood clot in a vein
- Infection
- An allergic reaction to the anaesthetic

The surgeon should explain how likely these risks and complications are, and how they would be treated if they occurred.

Occasionally, people find the desired effect was not achieved and feel they need another operation.

### **Smoking and Surgical Risks**

**Smoking increases the risk of complications both during and after cosmetic surgery.**

Chemicals in cigarettes restrict blood vessels and reduce the amount of oxygen carried in your blood. This can affect your safety during the operation and your healing afterwards.



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## Risks During Surgery

Smoking can lead to:

- Reduced oxygen delivery to tissues, making the procedure riskier
- Higher risk of anaesthetic complications, including breathing difficulties
- Poor blood flow, which can affect the body's ability to tolerate the surgery
- Increased risk of skin and tissue damage during procedures that rely on good circulation

## Risks After Surgery

Smoking also significantly increases the risk of:

- Delayed wound healing
- Infection at the surgical site
- Poor scarring or widened scars
- Skin or tissue loss (necrosis), especially in procedures involving skin flaps

To reduce these risks, patients are strongly **advised to stop smoking (including e-cigarettes and nicotine-containing products) for at least 6 weeks before and after surgery**. Quitting allows your circulation and oxygen levels to improve, supporting safer surgery and better healing.

## What if I have concerns?

You should contact the ER or the ward, as instructed prior to discharge if you have severe pain or unexpected symptoms.

Cosmetic surgery results may not always meet your expectations. If you are not satisfied with the outcome, you can discuss this with your surgeon.