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Liposuction Is More Popular Than Ever

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Is lipo... back? While liposuction never *really* went away, it has once again taken the crown as the most popular plastic surgery performed in the United States. And its significant rise in popularity could be a telling signal of how body inclusivity and acceptance is evolving.

What the data says

A study done by the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS) found that liposuction was the most-performed surgery of 2022, up a significant 23% from 2019. The ASPS, which represents 92% of all board-certified plastic surgeons in the United States, reports that about 1.5 million cosmetic surgical procedures were performed in 2022 and about 325,000 of them were liposuction.

Liposuction has long ranked in the top five most popular procedures in the U.S., but before 2021, it hadn't held the top spot since 2005. This year it didn't just hold on to that position, it dug its heels in deep.

A 23 percent increase may not sound like a ton, but that's actually a big jump. For comparison's sake: Breast augmentation, the second most popular procedure, only rose by four percent from 2019 to 2022. (After breast augmentation, abdominoplasty, breast lifts, and eyelid surgery rounded out the 2022 top five.)

“I think the lipo stats are essentially reflective of post-pandemic emergence,” says Dr. Gregory Greco, DO, FACS, a board-certified plastic surgeon in New Jersey who sits on the board of ASPS. “People either got in amazing shape or, without the motivation of gyms, had a little bit of a blockade to their fitness and all of a sudden things start to snowball.”

Dr. Steven Williams, a board-certified plastic surgeon and president elect of ASPS, points to the pandemic as a factor in the massive rise in plastic surgery overall, citing time away from the office with remote work, more flexibility to recover, and additional financial resources. “If you look overall, there’s an increase in procedures,” he explains, noting that abdominoplasty (tummy tuck) — 2022’s third most popular procedure — is up nearly 40% from 2019. “Specifically with lipo, though, there a few things that are going on,” he says. “More and more, it’s a part of multiple combined operations. If you’re doing a tummy tuck, a face lift, brachioplasty [arm lift], a thigh lift, all of those involve liposuction most of the time.”

The uptick in liposuction surgeries may also be a reaction to controversies and potential risks surrounding popular, less-invasive contouring treatments like CoolSculpting. For example, supermodel Linda Evangelista filed a lawsuit against CoolSculpting’s parent company in 2021 after she said the procedure left her “permanently deformed.” Dr. Julius Few, a board-certified plastic surgeon based in Chicago, wasn’t surprised by lipo’s leap last year. “In part because of how big the subject of the disappointments in non-surgical fat reduction has become, I knew there would be a bounceback to the tried-and-true,” he explains. “Lipo is the gold standard for a reason and I think it will remain that way. It’s something that has been around for more than 30 years.”

Over the decades, innovation has made liposuction more accessible, with less invasive techniques and shorter recovery times, not to mention additional technologies such as post-lipo skin-tightening with radio frequency. “You can get results with lipo that you never could have gotten 20 years ago,” says Dr. Few. “When you put it all together, it is a powerful offering: I have two weeks, I want to get results and I don’t want to have to do anything else major afterwards. It becomes a compelling option for lots of people.”

The Ozempic of it all

After a strong movement toward more body positivity and inclusivity, does this spiking interest in liposuction — and the current fascination with semaglutide medications like Ozempic to support weight loss — mean we’re firmly back in “thin is in” land? If you pay attention to fashion seasons, you may have noticed the lack of body diversity on runways around the world, despite earlier pledges from the fashion industry to showcase a wider variety of body types; while many brands showed models of varying body types on their runways in recent years, this has all but vanished yet again. If you’re on TikTok, you might have heard about “Barbie Botox” or “traptox,” which promises to relieve tension in the trapezius muscles — and elongate the neck for a slimmer appearance. Or maybe you’ve encountered the return of super low-rise jeans and their accompanying super-flat, nearly concave abs. Do these cosmetic enhancements

signal a return to the Y2K mindset of “skinny over everything?” The answer, of course, is complicated.

The resurgence of liposuction could be an indicator that the trend pendulum is swinging towards a thinness, but did it ever *really* go out “out of style” in the first place? “Thin was never out, but hopefully we’re educating people to be healthy, live a healthy lifestyle, find happiness and peace within yourself,” says Dr. Greco.

For Dr. Few, the buzz around semaglutides like Ozempic and Wegovy, which are prescribed both to help treat diabetes and for long-term weight loss, has been a discussion point in his practice. For example, Ozempic has prompted patients to talk with him about whether or not they want to take Ozempic — and a lot of patients don’t. But even having it as a starting point for a conversation has them talking more about lifestyle modifications and exercise for weight loss, with lipo as a supplement. “They’re looking at lipo as, ‘Oh, I’ve done the main work, [and now] I want to sculpt and enhance in a thoughtful way... if I have stubborn fat on my waistline [for example].’”

When gastric bypass procedure rates went up in the late 2000s and 2010s, many surgeons also saw an uptick in liposuction to contour the body after a significant weight loss. Dr. Greco predicts that the popularity of semaglutides like Ozempic and Wegovy may have a similar effect. “Because of the of semaglutide explosion, if you will, we’ll see more body contouring [including arm lifts, breast lifts, lower body lifts] spike again,” says Dr. Greco.

And now, perhaps more than ever, patients are coming in prepared: “They are continuing to ask the right questions,” says Dr. Williams. “They want to know that their surgeon is board-certified, they want to be able to see a large selection of patient results and want to understand the complications.” The American Board of Medical Specialities (ABMS) is dedicated to setting professional standards across the healthcare industry in partnership with member boards, and anyone can — and should — check a doctor’s ABMS board-certified via Certification Matters.

Of course, if someone wants to get liposuction, that’s their prerogative. But it’s also true that it’s important not look to plastic surgery to meet unrealistic body standards set by, say, Hollywood and high fashion runways. We’d love to look at these numbers as a positive reflection of people taking a step to make themselves feel better — one that falls into larger patterns of healthy eating and exercise — and not people reacting to pressure to achieve a level of “thinness” imposed by society.

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