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## Liposuction not a weight-loss program

**By DR. ALAN MUSKETT  
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What an appealing idea: That unsightly bulge you've acquired from dietary indiscretion, exercise allergy or the genetic lottery disappears. Love handles, saddlebags, double chins, spare tires, bat wings, banana rolls (forgive my use of these technical medical terms) gone in a relative instant!

If only it were that simple, we'd all be buff. But what is liposuction, and what is its role in the reshaping of a better you?

First and most importantly, liposuction is not a weight-loss program. Diet and exercise remain, boringly, the mainstays of weight reduction, health maintenance, diabetes management and avoidance, hypertension control and figure improvement.

But there are situations where areas of body fat remain refractory to our best efforts. You may notice a strong familial tendency toward specific fatty deposits. Otherwise flattering clothes can't be worn because they won't fit around that "holdout blob."

This can occur in several areas of the body. The mid-abdomen, around the belly button, can have a doughnut-like collection that is hard to get rid of. Similarly, the lateral thighs (saddlebags), flanks (love handles), the areas below the buttock crease (banana rolls) and the chin can be problematic areas.

Liposuction can be performed under general anesthesia or with intravenous sedation. The skin is numbed with a local anesthetic, and several one-quarter-inch incisions are made. A solution containing salt water, more numbing medicine and adrenaline (to decrease bleeding) is then infiltrated into the fatty area. Once the area is numb, a series of 2- to 5-millimeter tubes are introduced into the fatty deposit to suction it out.

Depending on the size of the area, the procedure takes from 30 minutes to three hours, and is almost always done on an outpatient basis. A compression garment, like a girdle, is worn to decrease swelling and fluid collection. Usually there will be a fair bit of pinkish drainage from the suction holes for a day or so.

After surgery, some swelling and bruising occurs. Although a little sore, most patients return to work in a few days. Final results are best seen after two to three months when the swelling is all gone.

Liposuction is generally safe, although complications can occur. Infection is rare, but not impossible. Asymmetry means one side might not be identical to the other. Contour abnormalities might show as dips or grooves where the healing was uneven. Fluid collections may occur under the skin.

But liposuction, if applied appropriately, can be a powerful tool in an overall program of personal improvement.

*Dr. Alan Muskett practices plastic and reconstructive surgery at Billings Plastic Surgery.*