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### Finally, a Liposuction & Tummy Tuck Story From a Black Plastic-Surgery Patient

Kovie Biakolo | March 23, 2023



Courtesy of Bianka Fort

For Black women seeking plastic surgery, the considerations are often different than their non-Black counterparts, and so are the trends. More Black women than ever are getting plastic surgery, and body procedures such as liposuction, fat grafting, and breast augmentation are generally the most sought after, says [Steven Williams, MD](#), a board-certified plastic and reconstructive surgeon in Dublin, California and president-elect of the American Society for Plastic Surgeons (ASPS).

The specific type of lipo Black women are getting tends to be less likely to include extreme surgical changes. Instead, patients are looking to preserve their “ethnic features” and “seeking plastic surgeons who are cognizant of listening to patients who may have been disenfranchised in the past,” says Dr. Williams.

New York-based plastic surgeon Melissa Doft, MD, tells Allure that for Black women, this means they are more likely to request a “curvier silhouette” than their white or Asian counterparts. According to Dr. Doft, Black women are also at higher risk for developing keloid scars after lipo. “If you have a history of poor scarring, you are more likely to form hypertrophic scars,” she says. “You should discuss this with your surgeon.”

The story below is from Bianka Fort, who tells Allure about the politics and procedure of getting liposuction as a Black woman. She also shares how she decided to go through with it, despite being previously apprehensive about plastic surgery and — in her own words — judgmental of it.

## **Bianka Fort, 32, Atlanta**

*When Fort's body changed after she had her daughter, so did her take on plastic surgery. While getting lipo and an abdominoplasty, she wanted to keep her curves in a way that still felt natural to her.*

### **Why I Got Lipo and a Tummy Tuck**

Prior to having my daughter — who just turned five years old — my breasts were not as large and my stomach was pretty much flat. But having her did something to my stomach muscles where they split. [Says Dr. Williams, “When patients complain that they look pregnant for months after delivery, many times muscle separation, called diastasis, is to blame. As the child is growing in utero, the pressure outwards pulls these muscles apart.”]

I dieted for two years and lost, like, 60 pounds, but I had loose skin in my stomach because of my weight loss. I couldn't ever get defined abs. For the amount that I was working out, it didn't make sense. [Explains Dr. Williams, “Unfortunately physical therapy, or core workout exercises, does little to restore the alignment of these muscles once they are separated.”]

So, I went to a plastic surgeon, Dr. James Parker, to talk to him about it. I actually ended up going based on a recommendation from my closest friend who has one daughter, too, and looked totally different after pregnancy. Her reasoning for getting surgery was very similar to mine.

Dr. Parker said it doesn't matter how many crunches you do, you're never gonna get abs back unless I go in and reconstruct your muscles. And that is what he did. He went in and reconstructed my muscles. [Fort had an abdominoplasty, in which a doctor “brings stomach muscles into alignment and sutures them in place during the body's healing process after the surgery,” says Dr. Williams.] I had a lot of fat on my flanks [the sides of the lower waist and back], so he went in and lipo'd my hips, basically.

I had been feeling like I was doing a lot of work dieting and exercising and was not seeing results. I felt validated when I went to the surgeon and he said my body became the way it was because of my labor. I had a breast reduction because I was uncomfortable. With the weight I had lost, I was disproportionate — it was too heavy. Basically, I got the “mommy makeover,” but I split it into two surgeries: a tummy tuck and lipo out of my flanks and in my stomach, in October 2022. And the breast reduction, for which they lipo'd a little bit of my boobs, was in October 2021.

I was so nervous [before the surgeries]. I had anxiety, especially about me not waking up from the anesthesia. I had never had surgery before. I had three or four prayer calls with my stepfather, who is a minister, just to calm my nerves around having anesthesia.

### **Why My Lipo Results Looking Natural Was Important to Me**

I can't speak for all the Black women who get surgery, but I can say that I purposely wanted to look as natural as possible. Unless you saw my abdominoplasty scar, which appears as a long C-section scar, you wouldn't even know I had anything done.

Look, I live in Atlanta and I didn't want to look like another Atlanta girl who had just gotten her body done. I wanted my own proportions from prior to the birth of my child. Black women like to preserve ethnic features, but sometimes it's just a desire to look like a stereotype. I guess I didn't want to have stereotypes attached to me that wouldn't be reflective of me — I didn't get a BBL [Brazilian butt lift].

I get that it is hypocritical of me to talk about BBLs in such a way, but the complications and risks of that are very different from what I got done. [According to a 2018 report from ASPS, BBLs have had a higher fatality rate, as many as one in 3,000 patients, than any other cosmetic procedure. While black-market BBLs are still incredibly dangerous, not to mention illegal, it is also true, says Dr. Williams, that "this operation has seen substantial gains in patient safety because of research and physician education. Recently, data indicates that a BBL performed by a board-certified plastic



Fort, before getting lipo and a tummy tuck.



Courtesy of Fort

surgeon using techniques to avoid fat injection to the muscle and tools like ultrasound have shortened the learning curve for plastic surgeons to be able to safely perform this operation.”]

I think looking natural was also important to me because I didn't want my daughter or husband to see me differently. I told both of my doctors that I wanted to look natural. It's so funny because, in this process, they ask you to bring pictures of your inspiration for what you want done. People usually bring pictures of celebrities, but I brought an old photo of myself before I had my daughter. I am my own goals.

You have some people who purposely want the BBLs and all of that and they want to look a certain way based on what they see on TV and stuff. It was a little different for me. Prior to having my daughter, I didn't have saggy skin. I didn't have stretch marks. I didn't have any of that. After my daughter, I had to get used to the way my body looked. And I did.... But it just got to a point

where I was like, “I know I don’t want to have any more kids, so this flabby skin has gotta go. But how do I get rid of it?” My surgeon was like, “Okay, surgery is how you get rid of it.” If he would have told me to do something else, I would have done something else.



Fort, after getting lipo and a tummy tuck.



Courtesy of Fort

## My Liposuction Recovery Time and Caring for Myself Through It All

My general doctor told me to make sure I was super active in advance of each surgery because it makes the post-op so much easier. I was very strict about working out and drinking lots of water and reducing my intake of sodium. One of my cousins, based out of New Jersey, is a chef, and she sent me, like, 50 no-salt seasonings because I cook a ton.

I knew I couldn’t stay down, because I had a toddler. I had some bad days, feeling tired and sore, but overall my post-op was bearable. To be honest, my pain was manageable — it wasn’t excruciating, so I just took ibuprofen. [Explains Dr. Doft, “Most patients are uncomfortable for the first two to three days after lipo and require pain medicine. Bruises will often resolve by the end of the first week, but may continue until the second week.” Doft says patients are asked to restrict exercise for the first few weeks, wear a compression garment to reduce swelling, and get lymphatic massage post-surgery to help reduce excess swelling faster.]

It took about three weeks for me to get back to my regular schedule. After two weeks, for example, I was back to driving. Back to work, being present with my family, taking care of my daughter and husband. I couldn’t work out until six weeks post-op. I had my drains taken out at week three. [Liposuction drains are small tubes inserted in an incision site to drain any excess fluid and blood.]

## **On the Politics of Plastic Surgery Like Lipo, Tummy Tucks, and More**

I just want to say I am a curvier girl and I didn't want to look disproportionate. I do understand that Black women desire these surgeries outside of individual reasons: If you want to date men in your race, for example, you have Black men who want you to look a certain way, and that may not fit what you currently look like.

I'm definitely concerned about how [portrayals of] body image in media and social media influence Black women. We — Black women — are the ones going to places that are not credible, especially abroad, and ending up dead after surgeries like BBLs. [The ASPS has previously reported that clinics performing plastic surgery procedures in the Dominican Republic, Mexico, and the Philippines “do not adhere to the same strict safety standards as required in the US. This may lead to higher complication rates and oftentimes less than desirable surgical outcomes.” And there can be other, much rarer dangers with medical tourism: Just this month, many of us read the story of a Black American woman who traveled to Mexico with three of her friends to get plastic surgery; they were kidnapped, and two of the group were killed.]

A big consideration is ensuring that you are financially stable, so that you can access credible doctors. I don't think you should miss a mortgage payment or a car payment or your child should go without because you want to get cosmetic surgery.

I will add that I was very judgmental about people who had surgeries before I got mine, and I would just say to anyone who feels the same way: Keep an open mind about it and really understand why one woman does it over the next. I think everybody has a different experience and wants different things from it.

<https://www.allure.com/story/i-tried-lipo-tummy-tuck-before-after>