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## The Most Popular Plastic Surgery Procedure Says a Lot About Our Culture Right Now

Elizabeth Siegel | June 28, 2024



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Liposuction is the most popular plastic surgery procedure for the third year in a row, according to a new report on plastic surgery trends from the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS). Before 2021, liposuction had always had a spot in the top five most popular procedures—but it hadn't risen to the number one spot since 2005. So what's with everyone booking liposuction now?

It's impossible to talk about liposuction's rise without mentioning the O word: Ozempic. Whether you've tried them, are intrigued by them, or are so over everyone talking about them, injections for weight loss (like Ozempic, Wegovy, and Mounjaro) have had an impact on plastic surgery—and on our world in general—that cannot be overstated. With one of these prescriptions, it's possible to drop a few sizes—losing 10, 15, 30 pounds—quickly. One in eight adults in the US has taken a drug like Ozempic, and two in five of them have used it for weight loss, according to a KKF survey; currently, more than 15 million people are on Ozempic or a similar drug, reports CNN. The rest of us are left watching as some of our friends, relatives, and reality stars suddenly trim up. How could that not be doing something to our collective body image?

“You have this culture of people getting thinner,” says Melissa Doft, MD, a board-certified plastic surgeon in New York City. “Not everyone wants to take drugs like Ozempic—there are real side effects to these drugs—but looking better when all of your friends are [is a compelling] option, and it's a reason why liposuction is so popular. As a culture, we're reevaluating what our bodies should look like.” (The most common side effects of Ozempic include nausea, stomach pain, vomiting, diarrhea, and constipation.)

When the numbers showed liposuction ticking up last year (representing a massive 23 percent increase over 2019), *Allure* asked if we were heading into dangerous body-image territory: “After a strong movement toward more body positivity and inclusivity, does this spiking interest in liposuction... mean we’re firmly back in ‘thin is in’ land?” wrote Kara Nesvig at the time. “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.”

And liposuction has only gotten more popular year over year—seven percent more procedures were performed in 2023 than 2022, according to the ASPS’ latest survey and trend report. Today, liposuction procedures are up over 30 percent since 2019.

To be clear, we’re not talking about millions of people getting liposuction—about 350,000 liposuction procedures were performed last year—and liposuction is not the same thing as Ozempic. Instead of getting you to lose a lot of weight quickly, liposuction is typically used to remove stubborn pockets of fat. For example, “the flanks [between the ribs and the hips] and sometimes the lateral chest [around your bra strap] are areas that tend to be a little bit more stubborn,” **Steven Williams**, MD, a board-certified plastic surgeon in Dublin, California, and president of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, has previously told *Allure*. Liposuction there tends to be an “easy procedure with great results and relatively low side effects or risks. The scars are really, really small and tend to be hard to notice.” (Plastic surgeons usually hide liposuction scars in folds of the body, or inconspicuous areas, like ones that get covered by a bathing suit.) In fact, plastic surgeons are seeing Ozempic patients—who may lose a lot of weight, but still be frustrated by certain pockets of fat—requesting liposuction on areas like the sides. Those cases partially account for why liposuction numbers are up.

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Still, between liposuction’s growing popularity and our fascination with drugs like Ozempic, I can’t remember this kind of a focus on thin since I was 16, idolizing Kate Moss spreads in *W* magazine. Is Ozempic the 2024 version of Moss, only instead of ushering in a “waif” aesthetic, as a society we’ve rebranded thin as the more-palatable “athletic”? In the ASPS report, there’s also mention of a “Ballet Body Trend,” which the authors say might include smaller breast implants and liposuction as part of a “look [that] emphasizes a harmonious, proportionate and elegantly contoured body shape that reflects the grace and athleticism of a ballet dancer.”

After I saw the latest ASPS stats, and read—cringing, frankly—this whole “Ballet Body” thing, I ran my theory by Dr. Doft, who remembered Moss saying, “nothing tastes as good as skinny feels” back in the ‘90s. I asked Dr. Doft if the shift in body standards we’re witnessing could become problematic. She was quick to answer: “100 percent.”

But it’s also true that liposuction can be a life-changer for patients. “It’s been used as a spring board for people who want to change their lifestyle,” says Dr. Doft. “It can make a major change in a couple of hours, and when they look in the mirror, they feel confident and good and are more likely to exercise after and eat properly, and live a better life. I think, particularly after COVID, a lot of people are looking for that better life, and they need that springboard to get started. I’ve watched my patients go through it, and it’s been really nice to see—they start exercise programs and eat better and become more active.” It can help them get over that mental hurdle that might keep someone from starting to work out, for example. “If you don’t feel great about yourself, going to the gym can be pretty intimidating,” says Dr. Doft.

The people getting liposuction right now are typically Gen Xers—patients aged 40 to 54 got 45 percent of all liposuction procedures in 2023, according to the ASPS. “It’s right around the time when people say, ‘Wow, I used to just drop the weight off, or get in shape by going to the gym for a week.’ But as time goes by, bodies metabolize fat differently,” says Dr. Williams. “I’m a Gen Xer, and we’re a generation that came of age with plastic surgery being more acceptable—we’re more conscious that we can [have liposuction to] get contour improvements.”

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There’s also the fact that menopause typically starts in your 40s or 50s (the average age of menopause is 51). “We hear patients say all the time that they feel like they were able to control the way they wanted to look with diet and exercise [before menopause], and something is different now and they need a jump start to break through,” says Dr. Williams. “Smaller operations like liposuction are a nice way to get back on track.” (The recovery for liposuction tends to be quick—patients usually return to work in less than a week, and wear compression garments or get lymphatic massage for two to three months, says Dr. Williams. But it doesn’t interfere with their daily activities. The average cost of liposuction is \$3,518 per treatment area, according to the ASPS.)

Liposuction’s relatively quick downtime and reliable results have made it “a powerful offering: ‘I have two weeks [off], I want to get results.’ It becomes a compelling option for lots of people,” Julius Few, MD, a board-certified plastic surgeon in Chicago has previously told Allure.

It’s also made liposuction an adjunct to a lot of other plastic surgery procedures—and plastic surgeons are doing a lot of other procedures. More than 1.575 million in 2023, to be exact—a five percent increase over 2022’s record-breaking number of about 1.498 million.

And as the number of plastic surgery procedures skyrockets, so too do the number of liposuction procedures performed. Take the most-frequently performed procedures on the top five list, right behind liposuction: breast augmentation, tummy tuck, and breast lift, in that order. Each of these is often combined with liposuction. “Even today, I did a mastopexy [breast lift] with liposuction,” says Dr. Doft, who then used the patient’s own fat in “the upper poles of the breasts, [which is] that cleavage area... People like the idea of having liposuction and repurposing or recycling the fat where it might be better perceived.” During a facelift, for example, plastic surgeons might use fat to restore volume in the cheeks. During a “mommy makeover,” they might perform an abdominoplasty, tightening the abdominal wall muscles and taking out extra skin, “but you want to keep scars short on the surrounding area, so we might use liposuction on the flanks,” says Dr. Williams. Breast implant removals (which were up nine percent in 2023) may include liposuction on the stomach for balance, or a breast augmentation (up two percent) may include it on the fat in front of the underarms. “Liposuction can be a major part of almost every operation, even when we’re adding volume with a breast augmentation, contouring the lateral chest wall can make people look better overall,” says Dr. Williams. “It has the ability to customize a [patient’s overall] look [and plastic surgery results] in fine detail.”

It’s part of a bigger trend in plastic surgery: combining procedures that can “help the patient get to where they want,” Dr. Williams has previously told Allure. “And I think that’s a positive.”

<https://www.allure.com/story/liposuction-most-popular-plastic-surgery>