

PLASTIC SURGERY

Best of both worlds

Instead of throwing away unwanted fat removed from one part of your body, why not use it to augment other areas?



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Have you ever wondered how nice it would be to remove unwanted fat in the body and reuse it to enhance areas such as the breast and buttock? This is now achievable with an advanced approach called Body to Breast Contouring.

Although fat transfer technology is not new, previous techniques of fat purification were not well developed. Often, only about 30–60% of the amount injected survived. However, the technology has since matured, with better understanding of the biophysiology of fat tissue and its role in stem cells, as well as the invention of better machines to harvest, concentrate and refine the extracted fat. Doctors are now able to withdraw larger volumes of fat for use.

One such machine is the Lipokit. It is a useful device that harvests the fat like a liposuction machine, which provides contouring of the donor area (usually the stomach or thighs). At the same time, the fat is purified and then injected into the breast for reshaping or augmentation. This is an exciting option for people who do not wish to go under the knife or have prostheses in their bodies.

Pros and cons

Alternative to invasive procedure

Pro: Plastic surgeons are able to offer a non-surgical option for breast enhancement in place of traditional surgery using implants. Under usual circumstances, the patient can preserve about 70% of the original volume of fat that is injected.

Con: The amount of fat that can be injected is not limitless. If the fat goes beyond the maximum level, its chance of survival is slim because too many fat cells are competing for the same blood supply. When the fat cells die, the patient may end up with a size that is smaller than expected. To ensure that more fat can survive in the new environment, it must be treated with care and not be traumatised.



No fear of rejection

Pro: As you are using your own fat tissue, there is no risk of rejection or incompatibility. Since fat cells are living, they are less likely to disintegrate or be absorbed like other synthetic filler materials, which often do not last more than a year.

Customise your size

Pro: The doctor is able to customise and inject the precise amount of fat required for each breast and in the exact areas, so that the outcome is in line with the patient's objective. It is common for a woman's breasts to be slightly different in size. With this technique, it is possible to input more fat on one side and less on the other to correct the asymmetry.

Con: Due to the limited amount of fat that can be injected each time, breast augmentation from fat transfer will only make you one cup size bigger. If a patient wants something more, the procedure would have to be repeated. Touch-ups can be done after a few months but you may run out of fat.



Safe and swift

Pro: The duration of the procedure depends on how much fat needs to be removed. As body shaping (fat removal) and breast augmentation (fat injection) are performed simultaneously, it usually takes two to three hours. There is no need for hospitalisation.

Most patients recover from the liposuction within two weeks to a month. You are advised to wear a support bra and compression garment around the area where fat was withdrawn to control possible swelling. Normal activities can be resumed soon after, with no worries of complications (such as breaking of breast implants).

Con: It is a neat, clean and safe procedure with minimal potential side effects. Nevertheless, the risk of infection comes with any surgery and some patients may get some bruises, though that is uncommon and non-severe. In rare cases, fat embolism may occur. This happens when the fat is accidentally injected into a vein. By injecting very small amounts carefully and slowly using a blunt cannula, the risk of this happening can be greatly reduced.

Debunking myths

Many patients are concerned that the fat injected may mimic changes as seen in breast cancer and thus affect the reading of mammograms. This is a fallacy — the fat is only injected around and beneath the breast and not into the glandular tissue, hence the confusion will not arise.

Other than people with too little fat to be extracted, this procedure is suitable for most. In particular, it is a good option for those who are not looking to have huge changes in their breast size but just want some enhancement. 

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