

smooth operators

Story by Julie Cope Saetre

Three local experts give us the skinny on reshaping our bodies

Today's body sculpting procedures—achieved through efforts such as tummy tucks and liposuction—offer ways to contour many problem areas, from a pouchy tummy to flabby underarms, but the key, local physicians say, is knowing which procedure is right for you—and what you can realistically expect from the results.



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The first thing to understand, they explain: If you're looking to drop excess fat pounds, body sculpting is not your solution. "The person who's going to have the best outcome and the best result is the person that came to you who's already done their homework," says Dr. Janet Turkle of Turkle & Associates, a Carmel-based plastic and cosmetic surgery practice. "They're at their ideal weight. They're maintaining a good level of fitness. They're maintaining a good dietary habit. I don't think you ever are going to create a thin person out of a heavy person with one of these procedures. That's not what the procedure is really for."

At Beautopia Spa Medica in Fishers, Dr. Tammy Polit offers services ranging from lower eyelid (blepharoplasty) procedures to tummy tucks. The medical director's patients have ranged in age from 20 to 76, but most of them had one thing in common. "Typically, people are of a normal body weight, and those people are going to see the best results," she says. "The heavier you are, it's going to be more of a subtle change in reducing the fat-pad

size. So they're not going to see as dramatic a result as a normal-weight person would."

Trouble Shooting

What body sculpting procedures will do is help you fine-tune trouble spots. And one of the areas most targeted by patients—no surprise in our six-pack-obsessed society—is the stomach. In such situations, the solution of choice is often a tummy tuck, or abdominoplasty.

Turkle performs an average of five to seven tummy tucks a week, often on mothers who have finished their families and are seeking a "mommy makeover." Pregnancy and childbirth can take their toll on abdominal muscles, causing them to weaken and separate. During a tummy tuck, the surgeon removes stubborn excess fat and skin and tightens the underlying muscles in the abdominal wall.

While many tummy tuck patients are moms in their late 20s or early 30s, they definitely don't represent everyone requesting the procedure. "A

lot of the folks who have delayed child bearing, sometimes they're in their 60s and 70s by the time they've gotten that last child out of school," Turkle points out. "And so it's not uncommon to see people do things once they've gotten to a point either financially or socially where they feel like they can afford to take off the time and spend the money."

Polit's oldest tummy tuck patient was 76. "She'd had that tummy pouch since she was in grade school and wanted it gone. And it came out quite nice. She was very happy with it."

It's not someone's age that determines whether a body sculpting procedure is appropriate, the surgeons add. It's the person's overall physical health that counts. "A lot of times, folks come in, and they're like, 'Am I too old?'" Turkle says. "As long as their health is good and their fitness is to a point where they can recuperate nicely, the answer is no."

Tummy tucks are also particularly popular among patients who, either through diet and exercise, bariatric surgery or a combination of all three,

have lost massive amounts of weight. The fat may be gone, but left behind is lax, sagging skin.

"It can be very dramatic, the amount of extra skin they have," says Dr. John Aker of Sando Jones Aker in Carmel. "The most amount of skin that we've removed from the tummy area was about 60 pounds. It's not a weight loss procedure, per se. It's a contour procedure. We need to remove the extra skin and tighten the deeper structures within the rest of their body proportion."

Because massive-weight-loss patients all carry their weight differently before dropping the pounds, individual approaches to removing that skin will vary. "Three different people could lose the exact same amount of weight, and they all have issues in different parts of their body," Turkle explains.

In some cases, a tummy tuck is not sufficient. An extended tummy tuck targets not only the abdomen but the sides (including dreaded "love handles") and back. The more extensive lower body lift focuses on the abdomen, thighs, buttocks and back.

"It's very similar to an extended tummy tuck," Aker says, "except ... we're introducing an incision down the outer thighs, which helps free them up, and the outer thigh (area) is pulled up like a pair of pants. That's usual for the folks that carried a little bit more weight at their sides."

Ultimately, the solution might include multiple procedures. Some women, for example, lose volume in their breasts when they lose weight overall. For such patients, Aker removes redundant tissue from the sagging lower breast area

while adding an implant to restore volume and shape in the upper breast.

"The main thing is just what's a reasonable amount (of surgery) for them to handle at one time as far as recovery and healing," says Aker. "It's really common for folks that have lost a dramatic amount of weight to have several stages. The first stage most commonly is the tummy or the breast area, and the second stage is either the thighs or the arms."

Another point to keep in mind: Tummy tucks provide dramatic results but also are performed as in-patient procedures, requiring an overnight hospital stay and a one- to two-week recovery period, Aker says. "You use your core muscles for everything. So those core muscles are pretty sore because of that tightening."

Trimming the Fat

For patients who prefer a less-invasive procedure, especially those with good (read: not lax) skin tone, liposuction techniques offer an alternative. In liposuction, a long, slender tube or cannula extracts fat from targeted areas using suction. If the patient has good skin tone, the skin will "snap back" into place after the fat is removed.

Patients often choose liposuction for stubborn fat deposits that refuse to budge no matter how many miles they log on the elliptical. And it's not just for larger areas, such as the thighs. Chin, jaw, neck, arms—all can come into play depending on a patient's concerns.

Several "add-on" elements have joined the tra-

ditional liposuction lineup. In tumescent liposuction, a fluid containing saline, epinephrine and a mild anesthetic is inserted into the fatty area prior to suctioning, to reduce pain and bleeding and ease fat removal. Ultrasonic liposuction brings microwave energy into the mix to break up fat.

Traditional, tumescent and ultrasonic liposuction procedures are usually performed under general anesthesia, and recovery times vary depending on the number and type of procedures done. Turkle's office suggests a general rule of three to five days off work, with cardio exercise reinstated after two weeks.

At Beautopia, Polit performs liposuction with the assistance of a diode laser, which she said allows for deep "debulking" of fat along with skin tightening benefits.

In what Beautopia bills as "awake tumescent techniques," the patient forgoes general anesthesia for a numbing type administered through IV fluid. "This is done while the client is awake," she explains. "They can drive within 12 hours of the surgery, and they don't have the cost of the anesthesia or the anesthesiologist."

At two to four hours, the "awake" procedure is longer than traditional lipo types. "(When) the patient is asleep, (surgeons) can definitely move a lot faster with the liposuction," she says. "But (because) our patient is awake, if they need to get up or we need to check with gravity to make sure that each side is equal and their contouring is quite pretty, we can actually have them stand up, and I can sculpt while they're standing up."

For any form of liposuction, bruising may



RoseMarie Jones, M.D., F.A.C.S.

Bariatric surgery at Community.

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occur afterward. Surgeons recommend compression bandages to reduce swelling; Polit starts patients on a vitamin K regimen to address bruising issues. Total results may take months to fully surface.

“The collagen formation takes about six months to tighten up,” Polit says. “But generally speaking, most people notice significant improvement in much less than six months. In fact, we’re posting (patient) photos anywhere from five weeks to three months.”

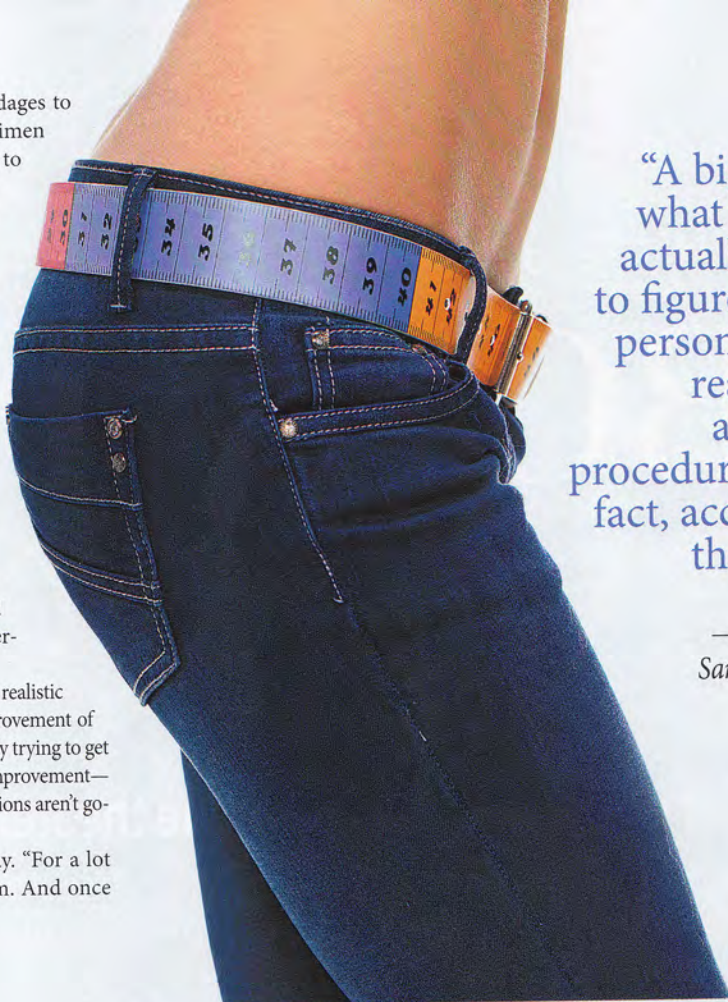
Keeping It Real

With the wide array of options available, it is crucial for potential patients to complete a thoughtful consultation with a physician. “A big part of what we do is actually trying to figure out if a person’s goal is reasonable and if the procedure can, in fact, accomplish their goal,” Aker says.

You’ll need to prioritize what you want to treat, have your current physical health evaluated and view before and after photos of patients with similar body types who underwent your procedure(s) of choice.

“Although (patient expectations) may be high, we want to be realistic about this,” Polit says. “We would expect at least 50 percent improvement of the debulking of the fat area that they’re looking at. And we’re really trying to get a lot better than that. ... But if they’re looking for 95 percent improvement—that’s close to perfection—then we worry that maybe the expectations aren’t going to be very consistent with what we’re going through.”

Sometimes, Turkle says, a little work goes a long way. “For a lot of our patients, they just have one area that bothers them. And once that’s fixed, they’re good to go.” ○



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