

SHAPE



Liposuction: Does the Fat Really Come Back?

April 2012

by Alanna Nuñez

For those who struggle with their weight, liposuction can remove unwanted fat from different areas on the body. However, when research last year was published suggesting that liposuction has the potential to return within one year, we were intrigued. In a study of 32 women that was published in the journal *Obesity*, researchers at the University of Colorado assigned 14 of the subjects to undergo liposuction, while the 18 who didn't served as the control group. Although none of the women changed their diet or fitness habits, researchers found that the fat that returned after surgery wasn't the kind that lies directly under the skin (known as subcutaneous), it was the deeper visceral fat typically associated with heart disease. However, the researchers noted that they didn't encounter any adverse medical side effects.

Since this would basically defeat the purpose of liposuction, we went to noted plastic surgeon **Dr. Gerald Imber**, SHAPE's new columnist and the author of *The Youth Corridor*, to get his answer to the question: Does the fat really come back?

"No," Dr. Imber says. "This is a myth perpetuated by a lack of understanding of how liposuction works."

The fat will only come back if you don't make any lifestyle changes, he asserts. "Liposuction removes fat cells from a particular place, say your hips," Dr. Imber says. "So if you have fat cells removed from your hip area and then continue to eat too much, you'll gain weight. Since the fat cells on your hips will have been removed, the new calories will have to find fat cells elsewhere in which to reside."

Subsequently, he says, you can find yourself gaining weight in different areas of the body than you have previously. However, Dr. Imber stresses that it has nothing to do with liposuction and everything to do with lifestyle.

"Liposuction works best as a spot remover," Dr. Imber says. "It's not meant to turn a size 16 into a size 6, but it can remove that recalcitrant bit of fat around your waist, ankles, or knees where no amount of self-help does the job."