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Liposuction sucks, but does it work?

You have to be brave to try lipo, but is it worth the trouble?



Is surgery the best way to get this waist?

Sarah Vine

The Hurlingham Clinic in Putney is a discreet affair, a converted church that now worships an entirely different deity: the body beautiful. I am here to witness Smartlipo, the very latest in fat-busting technology. Owing to extreme cowardice, however, it is not I who will be having my excess fat lasered; it is my friend Bella: the bravest, most reckless person I know.

Bella's surgeon is Mr Ayham Ayoubi, an exuberant gentleman with a reassuring bedside manner. He is a pioneer of Smartlipo in Britain, and has evolved his own technique: a combination of laser and suction, followed by a treatment called Velashape to help eliminate fluids and improve skin texture.

The treatment starts with a couple of Valium (for Bella, not me), after which Mr A marks her up with a felt-tip pen. She is having her tummy and upper arms done. Mr A explains the science: unlike traditional liposuction, which attacks solid fat, Smartlipo zaps the fat cells first, emulsifying them. This makes it easier for the surgeon to remove the blubber, and enables the body to metabolise the remaining fat cells as waste. Bella will see an immediate change, but the final result will take a few months.

Next, Mr A slides a very big needle underneath the skin, releasing anaesthetic through a series of tiny holes. Then the laser goes in. There is occasional pain where the laser meets the end of the anaesthetic, but overall it is more uncomfortable than sore.

There is some suggestion that patients might read during the procedure, but as Bella pointed out, it would have to be the most engrossing book in the world. Instead, she and Mr A keep up a constant banter. When it's time to do her arms, he manoeuvres her into a series of awkward positions to get the correct shape – and an errant globule of fat shoots out and hits him on the shoulder. Ever professional, Mr A smiles and carries on.

All in all, Bella was on the operating table for three hours: "A very long time to be brave," as she put it. As I escorted her to the car she was sore and slightly hysterical, but otherwise fine. Mr A gave her a course of prophylactic antibiotics, strict dietary advice and support bandages. He had removed almost two litres of fat.

I have to be honest: it was pretty hairy. No matter how skilled the surgeon (and Mr A was extremely impressive), this is not something you should undertake lightly. However, Bella has no scarring (the small puncture wounds healed almost immediately) and she has had no complications. What she does have is thin arms, a flat belly – and the holy grail of the fortysomething female: a waist. I cannot lie; I am green with envy.

Smartlipo with Mr Ayoubi starts at £1,800. 020-7348 6380; www.hurlinghamclinic.com