



Liposuction surgery for people with lipoedema

Surgery is not widely used for people with lipoedema and is not suitable for everyone. It is not a cure for the condition and there has been limited research done. It is important to be realistic about the possible benefits, and to fully understand the demands of the surgery and aftercare.

Liposuction involves making small incisions in different areas to insert a cannula that sucks out fat, usually from the legs, hips, buttocks, arms and/or abdomen. People often have 2 or 3 operations that are around 2-3 months apart. Mostly, this is done under general anaesthetic, but some are done under local anaesthetic.

Liposuction is not currently available within the NHS in the UK. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) reviewed evidence and published guidelines in March 2022. These state that liposuction can only be done in the NHS for people with lipoedema under research conditions. This research is not currently being undertaken and the guideline will be reviewed in 2025.

Some private surgeons in the UK and abroad still provide liposuction for people with lipoedema. Talk Lipoedema cannot recommend particular clinics but want to see more research undertaken. We are keen to hear about your experiences. You can find out more from people who have undergone liposuction through our private chat Facebook liposuction page.

If you are considering having liposuction with a private doctor or clinic, we recommend that you:

- Use other self-management approaches such as wearing compression, healthy eating, and physical activity to manage your symptoms before going for surgery; sticking to these after surgery will be important to the long-term success of your surgery
- Talk with others who have had similar surgery, your NHS lymphoedema practitioner, or MLD therapist, if you already attend a clinic; be aware that professionals cannot recommend clinics and may not be familiar with liposuction procedures
- Investigate what is offered from clinics; ask them for detailed written information on their surgical technique/ approaches such as: how many operations you will require; what areas are treated with each operation; and if they use power-assisted, water-assisted or another type of liposuction.
- Get full details on their costs, and possible additional costs such as pre-surgery investigations, new compression garments after each operation, and manual lymphatic drainage after surgery.
- Be aware that you may require tests before surgery, such as: an ECG to check your heart; a scan of your arteries or veins; and/ or lymphoscintigraphy to exclude problems with your lymphatics. These may not be available on the NHS so you may have to pay privately and these can take time to arrange.
- Find out if the surgeon requires you to wear compression garments before surgery. If this is a requirement, you may have to find a private therapist to measure you and order these privately, as they are not likely to be available on

the NHS. These may cost over £200 per pair. Some surgeons require a person to wear compression class 2 custom made garments for 6 weeks before surgery. Commonly used brands of medical garments include: medi UK; Essity (Jobst Elvarex); Haddenham; and Juzo.

- Find out if the surgeon requires you to have manual lymphatic drainage therapy before or after surgery. This is unlikely to be available on the NHS and some people also pay for a private therapist to treat them after surgery (see www.mlduk.org.uk).

What happens after surgery?

Most people feel quite bruised, light-headed and sore after liposuction so do not expect an immediate recovery. Most surgeons insist that you recover for a few days before getting on a flight or travelling a long distance. Staying for a few days in a nearby hotel will be an additional cost.

It is important to always have someone with you for the few days after the operation. Having someone with you also helps with the mental and emotional aspects of recovery. You will need several weeks to recover fully and may have to carefully plan the surgery around other commitments.

Many surgeons require people to wear flat-knit compression class 2 garments after surgery. Advice varies and some people are advised to wear them every day, sometimes overnight, for several weeks, months or years. Flat-knit garments are usually measured to accurately fit your size, so you may need to be remeasured after surgery. Please note that these garments may not be available through the NHS when people are seeing a private surgeon. Some NHS clinics will only remeasure you if you are already a patient at their clinic.

Some questions to ask your surgeon:

- How many operations will I need, what areas are treated, and what type of liposuction do you offer?
- Will I need a general anaesthetic?
- How long will I be in hospital and how long to I have to stay in accommodation near the hospital before I can travel home to the UK?
- Do I need to wear compression and have manual lymphatic drainage before and/or after the surgery- and for how long?
- How will my pain be managed after surgery?
- What side effects or risks should I consider?
- What are the costs of the surgery and the extras that may be required such as manual lymphatic drainage immediately after surgery?
- How often will I be reviewed or followed up, how do I contact the surgeon once I am home, and what do I do if I have problems after the operation?

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Date of publication: February 2023

Date for review: February 2024