

Is Smart Lipo for Me?

Because the major challenge to good results with liposuction is the ability of the skin to contract over the reduced volume of fat, various methods have been devised to try to tighten the skin, and thereby improve the outcome. Attempts have been made from externally, with ultrasound and various skin-tightening lasers, and internally with “superficial” liposuction and later with ultrasound applied directly to the fat and undersurface of the skin.

The basic theory is that heat will cause the collagen fibers in the skin and those surrounding the fat cells to shrink. The most recent development along these lines is the application of Laser energy (Smart Lipo). Ultrasonic liposuction had significant potential for burns to the skin and surrounding tissue, due to the relatively large area of the ultrasonic waves (which heat up tissues, much like a microwave) resulting in less control. The laser can be delivered through a very small fiber, with a small (and therefore more controlled) area of action so that the risks are smaller.

The Smart Lipo fiber that carries the laser energy is very fine, and only needs a tiny opening in the skin of about 1.5 mm in order to be introduced under the skin and into the fat. It is done with “tumescent” or “super-wet” technique, whereby the anesthetic fluid distends the fatty tissues in the area to be treated, so that the fat is firmer, and therefore a more stable target; and because the laser needs water through which to work. Smart Lipo works by dissolving the fat cells, and tightening the collagen fibers in the fatty (subcutaneous) layer just under the skin. It is also applied carefully just below the skin to heat the dermis, and thereby cause the collagen fibers of the dermis to shrink. This leads to tightening.

Like any technology, there are limitations, and Smart Lipo has them. The skin can contract just so much over the reduced volume of fat, so you can’t correct a lot of laxity. And the liquefied fat should be removed, so a small liposuction cannula is used to suction out the liquefied fat and any residual fat as necessary. And of course, as with any energy source, there is a risk of burns of the skin, or the underlying tissues which can lead to prolonged firmness. Is everyone a candidate for Smart Lipo? Definitely not, and don’t forget that “traditional” small-cannula liposuction is still the standard, and gets consistently great results in the right candidate. Your surgeon should be able to guide you toward the best technique for your particular circumstances.