

## Mommy makeover: Cosmetic surgery gaining popularity to restore pre-pregnancy looks

THE COMMERCIAL APPEAL - BY BARBARA BRADLEY

JULY 10, 2011

Childbirth gave Amy Redden Smith a big 11-pound boy delivered by emergency C-section, and something else -- a drape of loose skin on her abdomen. Unresponsive to diet or exercise, the skin looked like “an elephant’s behind,” she said.

But 12 years after the birth of her second child, Smith, who has lately resumed a singing and songwriting career, opted for a “mommy makeover,” a term used to describe multiple surgeries to restore a postpregnancy figure. Most often it entails a tummy tuck with or without liposuction and breast work that could include a lift with augmentation or breast reduction.

It is increasingly popular. Last year alone, tummy tucks rose by 13 percent, breast lifts rose by almost 24 percent, and breast reduction rose almost 22 percent, according to The American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery.

Abdominoplasty (tummy tuck), liposuction, breast augmentation and breast reduction were four of the top five cosmetic surgery procedures performed for women last year, along with eyelid surgery.

Increasingly, it is younger women, often in their 30s, who seek the makeovers, said Dr. Phillip Haeck, president of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons. “They don’t want to wait years to re-establish how they used to look,” he said.

As with many cosmetic procedures, tummy tucks and breast enhancement have advanced. There is even a bra that uses suction to slowly increase breast size without surgery.

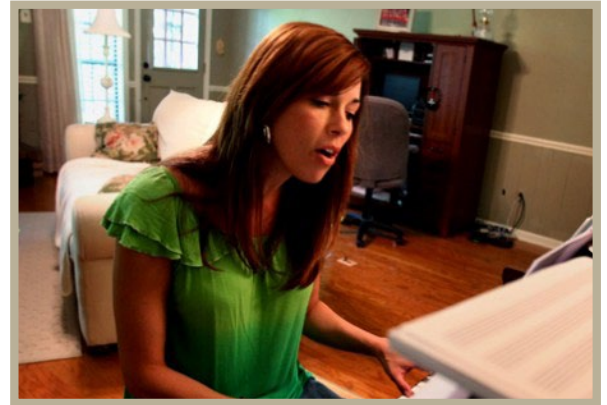
Performed in a variety of ways, tummy tucks can be less invasive, with fewer complications and downtime, and can even be more aesthetically pleasing than they were just a few years ago, according to Dr. Leo McCafferty, vice president of ASAPs and a clinical assistant professor of plastic surgery at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine.

“But the key is not so much technique,” he said, “but deciding on what technique to use, and the skill of the doctor who is using it.”

In no case are tummy tucks a quick way to slim down. Very overweight people are not good candidates for it, he said. It addresses problems that don’t respond to diet and exercise, such as loose skin and lots of stretch marks.

Redden’s procedure, performed by Dr. Gregory Laurence of Germantown Aesthetics, involved a tummy tuck and lipo. After her surgeries, “I felt kind of like I had had a baby and I was tired from the anesthesia,” she said. She was on heavy pain medication for about a week and wore a Velcro wrap over her bandage to support her stomach. She was afraid to sneeze.

But right away, her abdominal skin was tight and her tummy flat. Her small “love handles” were gone, and so was her C-section scar. In about a week, she was on her feet doing chores. In less than two weeks, she was back at her church leading the music ministry.



“I’m very excited about it. I never regretted it. I feel great,” she said.

“Mommy makeovers” are among the most common procedures done by Dr. Peter Aldea and his wife, Dr. Patricia Eby, who often do the surgeries together. The Memphis doctors are certified by The American Board of Plastic Surgery. Aldea is also chairman of plastic surgery at Saint Francis Hospital.

A large majority of patients will require a full or standard tummy tuck, Aldea explained. He described it this way: An incision is made along the panty line from hip to hip or shorter as needed, and another incision frees the belly button. A wide portion of damaged and loose skin and its fat are lifted off the abdominal muscles, ab muscles are tightened, and liposuction can be done on the back and hips. The loose tummy skin is removed, the remaining skin pulled down and a new opening created for the belly button. Temporary drain tubes are put in to prevent fluid accumulation, and the wound is closed with stitches at multiple levels.

A Brazilian or Saldanha-type tuck uses the same incisions but leaves more of the skin’s blood supply intact and allows for lipo all around the abdomen, he said. But it is best suited for thinner women.

Aldea said that in both standard and Saldanha-type procedures, most women return to a desk job in 10 to 14 days, and may be back in the gym in four weeks.

Patients dealing with massive weight loss and a great deal of loose skin can benefit from a fleur de lis tummy tuck, named for the shape of the incision, he said. A mini-tummy tuck is one that removes only the loose skin below the belly button.

Breast enhancement is also moving forward. There is even the Brava Bra Breast Enhancement System (see [www.brava.com](http://www.brava.com)), which increases breast size with the use of a vacuum machine and soft plastic domes worn over the breasts. Invented by a plastic surgeon, the Brava Bra appears to increase breast tissue the more it is worn. However, a woman has to wear it 10 hours a day for 10 weeks to move up one cup size. And it’s expensive, costing between \$900 and \$1,500.

Surgical breast lifting and breast reduction have evolved from operations in which the surgeon shapes breast skin to ones in which he shapes the large or sagging breast gland, said Aldea. The benefits are shorter scars and longer periods of breast perkiness, he said.

He noted that silicone gel implants are safe, lighter than saline, feel more natural and ripple less. Saline implants, on the other hand, are cheaper than silicone, can be placed through smaller incisions, and are easier to remove. The average life of implants is 10 years, though they may last as long as 20 years, he said.

Unfortunately, beauty isn’t cheap. RealSelf.com, a consumer review site for cosmetic surgery and procedures, reported the average price paid for a mommy makeover in its community was \$12,800.

The ASPS reported that last year plastic surgeons charged on average \$5,130 for a tummy tuck; \$4,207 for a breast lift; \$3,351 for breast augmentation and \$2,884 for liposuction of one area. That doesn’t include operating room and anesthesia costs.

While complications from tummy tucks and breast lifts, augmentation and reduction are infrequent, risks common to all these surgeries include scarring, bleeding, blood clots, infection, reaction to anesthesia, numbness, asymmetry and more.



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Physician qualifications are crucial. Doctors who belong to ASPS or ASAPS are certified by the American Board of Plastic Surgery, one of 24 medical specialty boards that make up the American Board of Medical Specialties, or the equivalent peer review organizations in foreign countries.

Some people feel that having elective cosmetic surgery is being superficial. But Redden Smith disagrees: “To be real is to admit these issues bothered me,” she said.

Recently she finished her junior year at the University of Memphis, where she is working on a degree in jazz vocal performance, and she now performs around town. “I’ve been able to gain some of my youth and confidence back,” she said. She hopes her story will encourage other women who may have put aside their dreams to pursue them again.

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