

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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LIQUEFYING THE FAT: ULTRASOUND EXPANDS SCOPE OF LIPOSUCTION

DALLAS — March 13, 1997 — Plastic surgeons at UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas are using a new method to remove fat in areas that previously were not amenable to liposuction.

In this field of rapidly developing technology, the newest is ultrasound-assisted liposuction (UAL). It uses high-frequency sound waves emitted by a hollow wand called a cannula to liquefy fat cells, which are simultaneously suctioned out through the cannula.

"We expect ultrasound liposuction to become the preferred method for performing liposuction in certain parts of the body where good results are difficult to obtain with traditional liposuction," said Dr. Rod J. Rohrich, chairman of the UT Southwestern Department of Plastic Surgery. "These problem areas include the back, flanks and large breasts in males affected by a condition known as gynecomastia."

Rohrich said ultrasound liposuction also may be used to resculpt areas in which previous liposuction left undesirable results.

Rohrich chairs the educational and research committee of a national task force established two years ago by the five leading plastic surgery organizations to collect and review data on ultrasound liposuction. The group's report has been submitted to the Food and Drug Administration, which is expected to issue an approval order that will make the process widely available by late spring.

During ultrasound liposuction, a fluid containing local anesthetic is injected into the fatty area between the skin and muscle, and the ultrasound wand is carefully guided through fatty deposits. The ultrasonic energy causes fat cells to vibrate rapidly, thus breaking up the cell walls and allowing fat to flow out. The liquefied fat and the injected fluid are then drawn out by low-pressure suction.

In traditional liposuction procedures, the plastic surgeon uses high-pressure suction to

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break apart the fat cells and then removes them through the hollow cannula. However, ultrasound liposuction reduces the effort needed on the part of the surgeon and allows him to concentrate on contouring the area being treated.

Because the fat being removed by ultrasound liposuction is liquefied, as opposed to the more solid fat removed by the traditional method, ultrasound liposuction has the ability to remove larger amounts of fat. It may also cause less loss of blood, less bruising and less pain. The amount of fat removed during one session depends on each patient's health and the surgeon's judgment.

Rohrich, who holds the Crystal Charity Ball Distinguished Chair in Plastic Surgery, said about 26 pounds of fat can be removed safely in one session. Additional liposuction is recommended for untreated areas or areas in which fat has returned several years after the initial liposuction, but patients are counseled to maintain a healthy diet and exercise program to prevent weight gain.

Rohrich said most plastic surgeons still will need to use a combination of traditional and ultrasound-assisted liposuction. Both techniques are needed because their effectiveness varies according to the consistency of the fat in certain parts of the body. Ultrasound liposuction is effective primarily on the upper torso and flanks while traditional liposuction is better at removing fat from areas below the waist and the head and neck. The cost of ultrasound liposuction may be slightly higher than traditional liposuction because of the cost of the new equipment and training required to use it.

"It is important that patients interested in ultrasound liposuction seek a properly trained plastic surgeon," said Rohrich, whose department is listed as one of *American Health* magazine's top medical treatment centers in the country. He is currently traveling around the country conducting training sessions and has trained more than 200 plastic surgeons in the use of ultrasound liposuction technology since January.

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