

Labiaplasty - A Common Request

The reasons women seek Labiaplasty are either cosmetic or functional, and there is a great deal of overlap between the two. Most women are concerned about both appearance and the discomfort caused by labial elongation. Labiaplasty most commonly involves labial reduction but may also include labial augmentation.

Reduction usually, though not exclusively, carried out on the labia Minora the 'inner lips' on either side or the entrance to the vagina. Labial augmentation is commonly used on the labia majora the 'outer lips' on either side of the labia Minora.

Some women live with the discomfort of elongation for many years and adopt strategies to reduce discomfort such as wearing loose clothing. A significant number of women who come to see Dr Blackstock for a labiaplasty say they have only recently become aware they could actually have something done to improve their condition. Sources of the information include word of mouth, magazine articles, advertisements, but mainly websites.

The number of women who report total 'dead-ends' and being 'stone-walled' when they seek help is disappointing. Some of those quotes have been, "You wouldn't cut your nipples off if they rubbed and chaffed, so why would you do that?" or "Only loose woman would want to do that" and "It won't matter, it won't be attractive to some men anyway!" Seeking help with genital issues is embarrassing for most women and being treated with such lack of empathy means that many women never seek help for the problem again.

Fortunately the emotional damage caused by the mishandling of a patient's request for a Labiaplasty does not usually result in significant psychological trauma. This is often the case for a woman whose partner tells her she has an ugly vagina or concerned about the lack of sensitivity she has during sexual activity. This kind of interaction is often the trigger that makes a woman seek help.

The psychological trauma that ensues most likely results in termination of the relationship and reluctance to become involved in another because of fear of rejection, and a negative body image.

Cosmetic considerations about the appearance of the labia may have been a factor since her early teenage years when she might have noticed she was not the same as her friends.

Labia Minora elongation is a natural phenomenon, takes place over time and can be exacerbated by pregnancy & childbirth. The woman affected will notice the length and thickness of the labia have increased. No uncommonly these changes in length and diameter are accompanied by increased pigmentation, making the labia appear darker and more prominent.

Functional reasons for seeking labial reduction, centre on discomfort or pain. Some women complain that when wearing tight underwear or trousers the labia become uncomfortable. Labial discomfort can prevent some women from taking part in sporting activities such as horse riding or cycling. Other women find that during sexual intercourse the labia fold onto the vagina, resulting in friction and pain.

Women with a raised body/mass index tend to have more prominent labia majora than the "slimmer counterparts. Enlarged labia majora can be a result of excessive fat deposition, excessive skin or a combination of the two. However, fat deposition or excessive skin formation can occur locally in the labia majora of many of any weight.

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Practical Considerations

Woman considering genital surgery need to consult with their physician about particular needs and goals for labiaplasty. Consultation should involve examination and a detailed discussion. Once they are confident their surgeon understands their requirements and they decide to go ahead with a labiaplasty procedure, surgery is organised. Preparation for surgery includes removal of all pubic hair around the labia two to three days prior to surgery. Hair getting into a wound can delay healing and increase the risk of infection. In order to ensure an aesthetically pleasing result and to avoid any clitoral injury, surgery takes place under a medium sedation and also local injections. The Labiaplasty procedure is scheduled to take place over approx. 3 – 4hrs and patients will require pain relief and antibiotics between three and seven days after surgery. Some bruising may result from the procedure.

After surgery, patients should anticipate being off work for a minimum of three to four days. This will allow for proper healing of the tissues to commence wearing comfortable loose clothing (no G-strings or tight underwear) and the reduction of discomfort and swelling. A return to sexual or sporting activities should be discussed with your surgeon prior to surgery, but on average can be approx. 4 – 6 weeks depending on the individual.

The main risk of labiaplasty is wound infection. To assist healing, cleansing with water, avoiding astringents, drying by dabbing rather than rubbing is advised. Labiaplasty Is an individual consideration. It is not merely the domain of strippers or porn stars. It can improve the physical and psychological quality of life for women who affected by genital irregularities. It is a procedure which, in the right hands has a good outcome with tow risk. Part of being a woman is not putting up with it', but taking control by having access to choice.