

make me OVER

COSMETIC expert, Mr. Gary Ross, has recently been awarded 'Best for Breast and Tummies' in the 2015 Tatler Beauty & Cosmetic Surgery Guide, and has received global recognition through RealSelf as being one of the top 100 doctors. Here we talk to the plastic surgeon about the every-popular 'mommy makeover' as a rejuvenation procedure.

A growing number of UK women are undergoing 'mommy makeovers' in a bid to restore their post-pregnancy bodies. This type of cosmetic surgery sees a year-on-year rise in popularity with women aged 35 and up, but what is it – and how can it benefit those unhappy with their post-baby bodies?

"A 'mommy makeover' is the term applied to a combination of surgical procedures involving both breast and body rejuvenation techniques," says Mr. Ross, a plastic surgeon based in Cheshire. "Due to changes in the skin quality and elasticity, combined with an effect on the ligaments of the breast and the abdominal wall, the changes associated with pregnancy can alter the appearance of the body significantly."

With improved techniques and recovery times, the mommy makeover – combining breast and abdominal rejuvenation – is increasingly becoming an option for patients and can be performed safely in combination, according to Mr. Ross.

"Most commonly when women complete their families they are disappointed in how their contour has changed," the BAAPS member says. "Often women look to improve the contour of both their breasts and their abdomen at the same time. Although not all women are suitable the vast majority can have both procedures simultaneously and consulting with a plastic surgeon that has experience of these combination surgeries is important. It is also important to consult with a surgeon who can show you examples of his or her work."

Not all 'mommy makeovers' are created the same though, and Mr. Ross reveals the commonest form of 'mommy makeover' is an abdominoplasty with or without liposuction and breast augmentation with or without mastopexy (breast lift).

"The abdominoplasty could involve surgery to the lower abdomen (mini tummy tuck), surgery to all of the abdomen (classic tummy tuck) and removal of tissue all the way around the body in the form of a body lift,"

Mr. Ross says. "The breast rejuvenation procedures commonly performed are breast augmentation, one staged mastopexy implant or mastopexy or reduction without implants."

While this type of 'all in one' treatment may seem attractive, Mr. Ross says when considering a 'mommy makeover' it is best to be at your ideal weight and have completed your family, and have the right support throughout your recovery.

"You should be able to have help at home postoperatively, especially if you have young children. Careful consideration of the postoperative arrangements is important so that you avoid excessive lifting in the days following surgery," Mr. Ross says.

The surgery should not be performed in smokers or those with significant co-morbidity, and with careful patient selection complications are uncommon.

"It is common to have swelling for a number of weeks afterwards, and the final results from abdominoplasty can take a number of months. It is also usual to have some discomfort which is more usual in the abdomen than the breasts," he says.

The success is influenced by your age, the size, shape and skin tone of the area to be treated, says Mr. Ross, adding that some contouring procedures leave only small, inconspicuous scars but more often than not more noticeable scars are necessary to achieve the desired result.

"Most patients find these scars acceptable and enjoy greater self-confidence. The scars do start off red and it takes a number of months for the scars to settle," he says. "All patients should be encouraged to massage the scars once the wounds have healed which helps the scars pale and become softer. Massage also helps with swelling which always occurs following surgery. This can take weeks to months to settle following surgery and again massage can help."

Pain is almost always inevitable following surgery but this varies between

patients, according to the breast surgery expert.

“Almost always the most uncomfortable part of any body contouring surgery is the tightening of the muscles of the abdomen which is often necessary in abdominoplasty and body lifting procedures. Sensation does change and although most sensation returns there are no guarantees that this will be the case and occasionally there are areas where sensation does not fully recover,” Mr. Ross says.

With all surgery there are risks of bleeding and infection and especially in weight loss surgery there are risks of the build-up of serous fluid called seroma.

“Occasionally patients may have to return to theatre, although this is uncommon,” says Mr. Ross. “For all patients undergoing rejuvenation surgery there are risks of the wounds breaking down or dehiscing. If this were to occur it can take weeks to months to heal depending on the extent. It is imperative that surgeons with appropriate experience perform this surgery and patients are realistic about what can be achieved. It is much easier to revise or remove extra skin at a second stage than treat a dehisced wound. Occasionally in abdominoplasty in order to keep the scar low a small vertical component may be needed.”

In mastopexy implant, the implants often sit high on the chest wall and it takes some time for the implants to settle, but Mr. Ross states that often a mastopexy in combination with an implant is the best way to rejuvenate the breast post pregnancy, providing volume replacement and a lift of the breast tissue up the chest wall.

“Patients wish to be able to take off their bra and for the breasts to stay in the same position. Similarly when lying down patients prefer for the breasts not to drop into the armpit and to sit more on the chest wall. A mastopexy implant can provide this,” he says.

Although there are anaesthetic risks with combined procedures any of the combinations of surgery described can be carried out in under 4 hours thus minimising anaesthetic risks and preventing the need for a catheter.

“Early mobilisation is important to decrease the risks associated with general anaesthesia and compression garments should be worn for 4–6 weeks alongside a support bra. Patients should avoid driving for a week and occasionally longer and should avoid lifting for the first week,” Mr. Ross says. “Generally in a support bra and compression garment patients can gain normal posture by 1 week and begin to get back to gentle exercise by week 2. Normal activities can resume between weeks 4–6.”

The combination of surgeries is often termed ‘extreme makeover’, however the combination of breast and abdominal rejuvenation surgery in one stage is increasingly being recognised as a better alternative in selected patients than splitting the procedures in two stages, explains the surgeon.

“Patients can turn back the clock and rediscover the contour they had prior to having children with one operation,” says Mr. Ross. “Although the ‘mommy makeover’ combination surgery can be daunting, complications are rare and satisfaction high. Aesthetically getting back what has been taken away helps to rejuvenate patients both anatomically and psychologically, and gives back their quality of life.” 

For more information about Mr. Gary Ross
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