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Thanks to the body lift, I was able to get rid of my saggy skin after losing 9-and-a-half stone

By [Alice Smellie](#)

Last updated at 12:26 AM on 6th March 2011



Slimmed-down Anthony Marsh. He now weighs ten-and-a-half stone

It is one of the most drastic and, some might say, barbaric cosmetic operations: the body lift.

Used to tackle the legacy of dramatic weight loss - the unsightly apron of flesh left behind after skin has stretched to accommodate fat - the four-hour procedure involves virtually cutting the patient's body in half to remove the unwanted tissue and tighten the underlying muscles, before stitching it back together.

And, rather than being seen as a last resort, increasing numbers of patients are now demanding the operation - also known as a belt lipectomy - according to the latest figures.

Spire Healthcare, one of Britain's largest private hospital groups, has seen a remarkable 97 per cent rise in patients undergoing post-obesity surgery (which also includes tummy tucks and arm lifts) in the past two years.

And other surgeons in the field are reporting percentage increases in the demand for body lifts of well over 100 per cent in the past 12 months.

Experts believe the increase is directly linked to the increasing numbers of patients undergoing weight-loss surgery, such as gastric banding and gastric bypass - about 14,000 of these operations were carried out last year.

Bariatric (weight loss) surgeon Paul Super, an expert on obesity and its complications, is not surprised.

'There are millions of very obese people in Britain,' he says. 'If and when they lose weight, whether through dieting or with the help of a gastric band or bypass, many will be left with rather a lot of ugly, saggy skin that no amount of exercise will get rid of.'

'Men have more of a tendency to develop an apron of loose skin because weight tends to go on their stomachs.'

'In my experience, half of men losing large amounts of weight would suffer in this way, but a significant number of women will also have the problem.'

'Essentially, the skin can only stretch so far before it loses its elasticity.'



Obese: A 20-stone Anthony, aged 16, at his school prom

Controversially, there have been reports of patients applying to have these cosmetic operations on the NHS.

At present the body lift is only available privately, unless there is disability as a result of the excess skin, or a life-threatening infection.

'Many patients may feel that they look deformed or abnormal,' says Mr Super.

'However, I don't think it's fair that the taxpayer should fund cosmetic surgery.

'There may be two million patients in the UK who are eligible for weightloss surgery that is life-saving.

'It's simply not feasible that they should then be offered cosmetic help as well.'

Anthony Marsh, 24, underwent a full body lift last year. He initially sought surgery on the NHS and was rejected, so he paid for the operation himself.

He says: 'I had asthma as a child and the steroids I took for this added to my weight gain. I've always been active, but at 5ft 4in perhaps I didn't need to eat as much as I thought, and the weight gradually crept up on me.'

Today, Anthony is slim and good-looking - almost unrecognisable from his school prom pictures. He was 16 at the time and weighed 20 stone, his waist was a staggering 48in and he was dangerously obese with a BMI of more than 40.

He now weighs ten-and-a-half stone, but losing his excess weight was far from easy. It took seven years of strict dieting and exercise. And, despite achieving a healthy weight, he was left with another problem.

'I had got rid of my body fat, but still had great disfiguring folds of skin around my stomach and back,' he admits. 'I looked like a human-shaped pink deflated balloon.'



How Anthony's body lift dramatically changed his abdomen

It was his GP who initially suggested surgery, and referred him to consultant plastic surgeon Gary Ross at BMI The Alexandra hospital in Cheadle, Cheshire.

A body lift was the best option, and Anthony was booked in to undergo the operation on May 5 last year.

He had reservations. 'I was worried about the stitches unpicking and me literally falling apart,' he says. 'But everything was explained to me carefully, so I knew the inherent risks such as blood clots.'

Mr Ross was also reassuring. 'The procedure has come a long way since it was first performed more than ten years ago,' he says.

'The key is in having an experienced surgical team - ideally three or four surgeons to minimise time spent under anaesthetic, a suitable facility and a dedicated nursing team.'

One of the most common complications arising from body-lift surgery is post-operative build-up of fluid beneath the skin. This can lead to infection and wound breakdown. But by keeping the operative time to less than four hours the risk is greatly reduced.

During the procedure two lines are drawn around the patient's body, marking the area of skin to be removed between them. The distance between the lines is typically eight to 12 inches but it can be more.

The patient is positioned on their front with their legs approximately two feet apart, to slacken the skin and muscle on the hips and flanks.

The marked area of tissue is then removed in a single continuous strip. In Anthony's case, an extraordinary 20in of excess flesh was taken away.

Fascia - connective tissue that supports the skin and muscle - in the buttocks and thighs is loosened, and the wound closed, pulling up the buttocks and thighs and attaching them to the deep fascia in the lower back. The skin is then sewn up with dissolving stitches.

'After this the patient is turned over and the procedure is repeated on the tummy area,' says Mr Ross.

'The tummy button is repositioned and the layers of the abdomen reconstructed. We use literally hundreds of stitches to bring the body back into its contoured shape.'

When he came round, Anthony had drains around his entire stomach area to remove excess fluid and was in a great deal of pain.

'I looked like an alien experiment and moving - especially sneezing - was agony,' he says. However, within two days he was on his feet, and after three was back at home. In all he had two months off work.

'I didn't need a morphine drip - I just took codeine and paracetamol,' he says.

'I could see how much better I looked almost immediately and couldn't wait to go back to the gym.'

He has only recently begun to comprehend the extraordinary extent of his weight loss. 'I was having supper with friends and they commented on how well I look,' he explains.

'A girlfriend mentioned that she weighs nine-and-a-half stone. That's how much I lost - an entire person's worth of fat.'

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You look fantastic. I need this procedure myself - only thing putting me off is the cost/

- Christine, Brisbane, 06/3/2011 06:58

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I'd rather the NHS paid for this sort of procedure providing the person has made the effort to lose weight themselves through diet and exercise than paying for them to be lazy and demand weight loss surgery.

- HmMMM, Herts, 06/3/2011 06:57

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Well done for losing all that weight I bet you feel just fantastic!

- FiFi, Germany, 06/3/2011 06:45

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His abdomen looks wierd.

- trevor, uk, 06/3/2011 03:16

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& what happens when they put the weight all back on? How many times can you have your skin cut away before it is tissue paper thin ? I think the surgery is wonderful for those who have proven they have kept the weight off for many, many, many years. I also think that just like a sex change operation (that causes permanent, drastic change to the body) they should be evaluated to make sure they are psychologically sound & not likely to regain the weight.

- Sarah, Iowa USA, 06/3/2011 01:01

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