

# WHAT HAPPENS UNDER THE *sheets* AFTER *surgery?*

We explore the questions around sex and intimacy that come with cosmetic enhancement.

BY LISA VAN DE GEYN

**IF** you're undergoing any type of invasive cosmetic procedure, we're willing to bet that the first thing you think about when you walk out of the recovery room isn't knockin' boots with your partner. Major surgery doesn't scream romance—it's certainly not synonymous with rose petals on satin sheets, a nice bottle of red and Marvin Gaye's smooth lyrics seeping through your iPod speakers.

All that said, let's be frank: Whether you're going under the knife for breast implants, a nip and tuck or a facelift, the thought of resuming your sex life post-op will re-enter your mind at some point. Dr. Jerome Edelstein, MD, FRCS, a plastic surgeon in Toronto, says the topic of sex after surgery "definitely comes up frequently" with breast augmentation, tummy tuck and labiaplasty patients. "It is not something I cover with every patient unless they specifically ask, which many do, but it is included in my post-operative instructions to all patients," he says.

So how long after a procedure do you have to wait before doing it? Does getting busy feel the same post-operation? And how will your mental state after surgery (your emotions and self-esteem) affect intimacy with your partner? Read on for all the dirt on sex après-surgery. ►

**WHEN CAN I START HAVING SEX AGAIN?**

There's no definitive answer to this question, and it depends on the type of surgery you have, but a good rule of thumb is to implement a no-sex rule for about three weeks following your procedure. This waiting period is usually to avoid bleeding and the potential for infection, as well as to allow discomfort or pain to pass. "For breast augmentation, sexual activity can begin after three weeks, but I have a 'look but don't touch' rule for the breasts for up to six weeks," says Dr. Edelstein. "For a tummy tuck, we want to protect the abdominal muscles, so sex after three weeks is fine, but patients have to avoid doing things that will stress those muscles." Patients who undergo facial surgeries are also recommended to abstain for three weeks, but women who go in for a labiaplasty (a labial reduction or reshaping), for example, are advised to refrain from hanky-panky for a good six weeks "to allow things to heal properly down there," says Dr. Edelstein. Even if your surgery doesn't have anything to do with your bits and bobs that are integral to intercourse, a roll in the hay could cause friction or pressure on the wound or might make dressings or bandages loosen or fall off.

**HOW WILL INTERCOURSE FEEL?**

Good news: Sex will be just as pleasurable as you remember it, or it might even be more pleasurable than it was pre-procedure. "Many of my patients can't wait for the three weeks to be over so they can get back to it!" admits Dr. Edelstein. "It is possible to have some nipple numbness after a breast augmentation, but it is almost always temporary. Other than that, I see very little interference from the surgery, except for the recovery period."

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**HOW WILL I FEEL EMOTIONALLY?**

This one's a little more complicated. While you might physically want to jump back in the saddle the minute your three-week waiting period is up, it doesn't necessarily mean your emotions, confidence or libido will be ready to go. Undergoing a cosmetic procedure is usually tied with wanting to fix or better part of your body, so one of the obvious upsides

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could be an increased sense of confidence and self-esteem. This might be the case, but it doesn't mean surgery is the answer to a not-so-hot sexual relationship.

"Any time a man or woman is self-conscious about his or her body, it affects their sex life," says Dr. Teesha Morgan, a Certified Counsellor with the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association and a couple's counsellor and sex therapist in Vancouver. For example, she says, "Some individuals want the lights slightly dimmed to hide their unsightly bits, while others need complete darkness and would prefer to be slightly clothed at all times." Some might be able to overcome their insecurities and issues

with self-esteem through talk therapy with a sex therapist or psychologist, while others might benefit from surgery. "If you're getting plastic surgery to appease a partner—to be a more alluring object of desire—then, in my opinion, it's not a good idea," she says. "However, if you feel that getting work done will boost your self-confidence so you can embrace your sexuality, have sex with the lights on or help you be present in your body instead of letting your mind

wander to self-conscious thoughts of how you look when you're naked, then by all means."

Studies have shown the link between cosmetic surgery and sexual confidence in women. Research conducted at the University of Florida College of Nursing reported a significant "direct connection between boosts in self-esteem and sexual satisfaction and the benefits of breast enhancement treatment."

Dr. Edelstein reports similar experiences with his patients. "I have found that cosmetic surgery often contributes very positively to a woman's sexuality. They feel more free and no longer embarrassed to be naked in front of their partners," he explains. "Sex often becomes more open and intense, and sexual interest and libido appear to be heightened. Of course, this is not always the case, but I would say it is the majority." Sex after surgery should be great for both you and your partner, and your newfound confidence can reignite that romance. ☺