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**SHEILA
MWANYIGAH?**

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WITNESSES**
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suspect parents
of infidelity

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lunch break

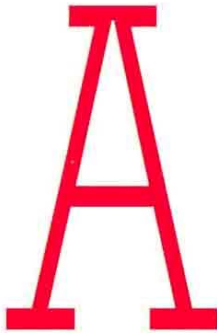
**AT
HOME
WITH
Jackie
Aligula**

**COSMETIC
SURGERY
IN KENYA**
What are
your options?

Powerful

- Our 50 most influential East African women
- How to get the life you want
- Help yourself get over him
- Make your way to the corner office





decade ago, exposure to cosmetic surgery was left to surgeons and their celebrity clients. Today you just have to switch on your TV to take your pick from *Extreme Makeover*, *The Swan* and *Dr 90210* for a dose of plastic surgery-related reality programmes. And if it is fiction you are after, there is always the award-winning *Nip/Tuck* TV series, resplendent with ample-busted vixens sporting recently streamlined waists. Welcome to the complex world of cosmetic plastic surgery

Once seen as a frivolous taboo by Africans, plastic surgery is becoming more acceptable – and available at a hefty price. Some of the very same procedures seen on Western TV shows can happen and are happening in Nairobi. As more Kenyan women opt for having their surgery done at home, it is important to know the risks and benefits involved.

TUMMY TUCK

As a wife and mother of two adult children, Amanda*, 48, is like many women her age, except she has recently undergone two surgical procedures: a tummy tuck and a neck lift.

Different factors led to Amanda's decision to have plastic surgery: a decade of weight gain (specifically in her mid-section) that took her from 58kg to 80kg, her beloved mother's death, and her 26-year-old daughter's upcoming wedding. "I looked old and fat," she says. "I was shapeless and I had nothing to wear." As for her plastic surgery goal, Amanda was realistic. "I did not want to look 20 and I did not want to become beautiful. I just wanted to look in the mirror and not think 'Oh, God!'"

One of Amanda's friends who had recently undergone a breast reduction procedure encouraged her to go for a consultation. Within less than a month Amanda was done with her two procedures. She says, "The difference was incredible. I went from a struggling size 18 to a comfortable size 15."

Amanda had had an abdominoplasty or a tummy tuck – one of the most sought-after procedures in Nairobi, according to Dr Creszenzo D'Onofrio, a reconstructive surgeon based in the city. The aim of a tummy tuck, he says, is to reduce large, protruding abdomens and give them a flatter appearance. The ideal candidate for this procedure is someone who is in reasonably good shape and who has tried in vain through exercise and dieting to lose unwanted kilograms around the midsection. Women who have been through previous pregnancies and who have found it difficult to get their pre-baby stomachs back also make good candidates. However, women who are planning on having babies are not encouraged to have tummy tucks as pregnancy will only reverse the results of this procedure.

Before the procedure, you will be offered a choice between general anaesthesia and local anaesthesia with sedation. The type of anaesthesia administered varies from person to person.

During an abdominoplasty operation, which can take anywhere from two to five hours, a long incision is made from one side of the pelvis to the other (very similar to where the top hem of your underwear sits). After that, another cut is made to free the belly button (believe it or not, belly

buttons can be relocated) which will eventually be re-stitched into a new position. The skin over the abdominal wall is then separated from the muscle up to the ribcage. The vertical muscles in the abdomen are tightened and stitched. Then the skin is pulled back down very tightly over the abdomen to meet the original incision line. Another incision is created for the belly button and lastly, the original long incision is sealed with stitches. A short-term tube may be inserted into the wound to allow any excess fluid to drain away.

For the next three days Amanda was uncomfortable and very swollen. Close to eight months later, she says she is a different woman. "I don't feel like such a frump. I feel fitter and trimmer and I make sure I exercise and eat well."

The two main clues that Amanda has undergone a tummy tuck are the scar left by the incision along her abdomen and the slight misalignment of her navel, which is a little off centre.

NECK LIFT

Amanda's second procedure was a neck lift. There are two processes involved in this operation: a cervicoplasty, involving the removal of excess skin, and a platysmaplasty, involving the restructuring of the neck muscles. It is not necessary to have both. Again, general and local anaesthesia are available, depending on the patient's circumstances.

During the procedure, tiny incisions are made around the chin and just behind the ears to reveal the muscles. The muscles are then tightened and any excess fat suctioned out. When the desired contour has been achieved, the skin is stretched back over the neck and chin and resealed with stitches. Excess skin is removed.

Amanda says she was shocked and horrified when she first caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror. Her face was extremely swollen and she had bruises where the incisions had been made. But within five days, the swelling had decreased to such an extent that she could attend a dinner party later that week. Amanda resumed all her regular activities within three weeks.

Again, many months later, one has to look very closely to notice the scars near her ears.

BREAST REDUCTION

Brenda*, a 27-year-old single mother of one, used to wake up exhausted every morning. For several years, the Nairobi hairdresser had been unable to sleep on her back due to the pressure her abnormally big breasts placed on her chest. She could not perform chores that required her to bend too far or stand for long periods because of the enormous strain to her neck and shoulders. And finding a bra her size in Kenya was impossible, with the result that her bra straps cut deeply into her shoulders. And as if she wasn't suffering enough physically, she was being scorned socially. "I used to dread leaving the house because of the comments people used to make," she remembers. "I would get taunts from older people and even young children."

Normally a size 14, Brenda's breasts became enormous during pregnancy, and stayed that way after her baby was born. Then she saw an ad about plastic surgery at Kenyatta, one of Kenya's largest public hospitals. It inspired her to go and have a breast reduction.

Today Brenda lives each day appreciating the effects of her surgery. "My relationship with people was terrible because of my huge breasts," she recalls. "Now I am happy – I can work again."

Dr Tanga Audi, a plastic surgeon at Kenyatta Hospital, says the

RISKS AND SIDE-EFFECTS

- Infection
- Swelling
- Bruising
- Allergic reaction to anaesthesia
- Blood clots and fat clots that can migrate to the lungs or heart
- Scarring
- Very itchy stitches
- Damage to the skin and nerves
- Asymmetry (especially for tummy tucks, breast reduction and breast implants)
- Death

issue

< psychological implications of enormous breasts are far reaching. "Many of these women are ostracised from their communities and suffer extremely low self-esteem," he says.

Unlike tummy tucks and neck lifts, a breast reduction is performed under general anaesthesia, and can take up to five hours. Breast reductions are, in most cases, coupled with a breast lift that restores the shape of each breast. The surgeon makes a keyhole incision, starting with a cut all the way around the areola (dark area surrounding the nipple), then a second incision down the breast. The excess tissue and fat is removed, the breast reshaped and stitched up. In most cases, the nipples remain attached to their blood vessels and nerves, but if the breasts are very large or pendulous, the nipples may have to be completely removed and grafted into a higher position.

BREAST IMPLANTS

Breast implant procedures aim to increase the size and shape of the breasts. During the consultations, the desired shape, size and profile of the new breast are determined by the patient and surgeon. General anaesthesia is encouraged for this procedure. There are three places where incisions can be made: where the breast and chest meet, in the armpit and around the areola of the breast, which is the preferred method in Kenya.

There are two types of implants available in Kenya:

- Saline implants, the more popular of the two, which are made from a natural salt solution and do not harm the body in case the implant ruptures or leaks – the salt solution simply flows through the blood stream and is eventually excreted.
- Silicone implants, which are made from silicone gel and pose graver danger to the body if they get damaged. American songstress and beauty icon, Toni Braxton, had her own implants removed in the late '90s as a result of leakage.

Breast implants offer women who had their breasts removed due to cancer a wonderful alternative.

LIPOSUCTION

Sometimes a person is in good physical shape, but has small pockets of fat, for example love handles, that refuse to budge after regular exercising and dieting. "Liposuction is one of the most requested procedures in my practice," confirms a reputable plastic surgeon in Nairobi who wants to remain anonymous. Problem areas that can successfully be tackled through liposuction include the waist, inner and outer thighs, abdomen, buttocks, upper arms, back and neck.

Once it is time to operate, the surgical team will determine what kind of anaesthesia will work best. Two tiny incisions are made in each selected area. From there, a thin tube is inserted into the fatty layer and used to break up the fat cells. Once separated, the fatty tissue is vacuumed out and disposed of. Because a lot of body fluids can be lost during liposuction, the surgeon must be very careful about how much fat he removes. If he removes too much fluid, the patient can go into shock and die.

BE REALISTIC ABOUT WHAT PLASTIC SURGERY CAN OR CANNOT ACHIEVE

"It is important for the patient to have realistic expectations," says Dr D'Onofrio.

It is recommended that a potential candidate pass psychological screening before undergoing surgery as a drastic change in one's appearance can have repercussions. As Melissa Dittmann states in an article entitled *Plastic Surgery: Beauty or Beast?* (American Psychological Association), the psychological factor in cosmetic surgery must not be taken lightly. She writes, "... patients who are dissatisfied with surgery may request repeat procedures or experience depression and adjustment problems, social isolation, family problems, self-destructive behaviours and anger toward the surgeon and his or her staff."

The choice to go under the knife or not to go under the knife remains solely with you. If you have seriously weighed up all the pros and cons of plastic surgery, and you are confident about your choice in surgeon, venue and procedure, then plastic cosmetic surgery may be the thing for you. ■

*Not their real names

USEFUL CONTACTS AND RESOURCES:

Kenyatta National Hospital, tel 254 (20) 272-6300-18

Karen Hospital, tel: 254 (20) 661-30-00

American Society of Plastic Surgeons: www.plasticsurgery.org

American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery: www.surgery.org

American Psychological Association: www.apa.org/monitor

WebMD Medical Reference: www.webmd.com

BEFORE YOUR NIP/TUCK

- Research your intended surgical procedure thoroughly. Ask your plastic surgeon all the questions you want; don't allow yourself to be intimidated.
- Be completely honest with your doctor about your medical history and let him or her know what medications and supplements you are taking.
- Be prepared to spend at least one night in the hospital. Also be prepared to take at least a week off from work and family obligations.
- Make sure you have someone to drive you home and to help take care of you during your healing process.
- Do not smoke or consume any alcoholic drinks at least two weeks prior to the operation.

AFTER YOUR NIP/TUCK

- Beware of warning signs, such as intense pain and excessive pus. Some drainage from the incision points is to be expected.
- Do not physically exert yourself, but doctors encourage mild exercise to keep your circulation going.
- Schedule at least three follow-up visits with your surgeon.
- Do not smoke or consume any alcoholic drinks at least two weeks after the operation.
- Once you have completely healed, monitor your progress and go for periodical check-ups.

FACT SHEET

Tummy tuck

Average recovery time: two weeks
Full recovery: Up to six weeks
Results: can last for 15 to 20 years
Not covered by insurance
Cost range: Ksh300 000 and up

Neck lift

Average recovery time: one week
Full recovery: at least three weeks
Results: can last for 10 years
Not covered by insurance
Cost range: Ksh150 000 and up

Breast reduction

Average recovery time: one to two weeks
Full recovery: minimum of one month
Results: permanent
Cost range: free (may be covered by your insurance if considered a health problem) to Ksh200 000

Breast implants

Average recovery time: one to two weeks
Full recovery: minimum of one month
Results: semi permanent – implants may have to be replaced every five years
Usually not covered by insurance
Cost range: Ksh150 000 – 500 000

Liposuction

Average recovery time: one to two weeks
Full recovery: minimum of one month
Results: may be permanent if patient develops a good exercise regime and sensible diet
Not covered by insurance
Cost range: Ksh300 000 and up