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Before

After

THE 'FOOT-LIFT'

The **ABC's** of Bunion Surgery: Aesthetic Bunion Correction

SOME BUNIONECTOMY PATIENTS ARE LEFT WITH REDUNDANT SKIN THAT IS THICKENED AND UNABLE TO RETRACT. IN SUCH CASES, THE REDUNDANT SKIN MAY BECOME UNSIGHTLY

Do painful bunions prevent you from wearing the shoes you want to wear? Are the risks and recovery times from surgery preventing you from seriously considering bunion surgery?

Bunions are one of the most common foot problems. When you have a bunion, the condition is such that the big toe points toward the second toe causing a bump on the inside edge of the toe. This bump is an enlargement of the joint at the base of the big toe, and is comprised of bone or soft tissue which many times can progress to become swollen and painful with shoes. Bunions are generally caused by poor bone structure and ligamentous laxity or "loose ligaments". Genetics also appears to play a role, though narrow-toed, high-heeled shoes can certainly aggravate the problem.

Bunionectomies (the surgical procedure to remove a bunion) have come a long way. Over the past century, over 100 different types of bunion procedures have been described. Many have had high success rates. The success rate has increased with recent refinements in surgical techniques, resulting in earlier ambulation and decreased recovery times. Despite the multitude of techniques for bunion correction, every patient is unique. Many factors, such as age, health status, activity level, work, and family obligations, must be considered when choosing the optimal procedure best suited for each individual.

Having performed over 2500

bunionectomies, at the renowned Kern Hospital in Michigan, at institutions in the tri-state area, Massachusetts, California, and in the United Kingdom, I have seen a great deal of variability in the methods used as well as a great deal of variability in outcomes.

When it comes to pain and activity, results have been satisfactory. However, some patients complain of excess skin that is left behind after a bunionectomy. This excess skin is typically considered normal and an expected part of the outcome of surgery. Many surgeons tell their patients that the skin will contract back as time passes, "Like a pregnant woman's belly does after she gives birth."

However, I have found that this is not always the case. Besides being thicker, the skin on the foot is also stronger and less elastic than the skin on the belly or face (Think of all the facial expressions that cause the skin on the face to stretch.) The skin on the foot must withstand more pressure and is therefore stronger and less elastic. As a result, some bunionectomy patients are left with redundant skin that is thickened and unable to retract. In such cases, the redundant skin may become unsightly.

To address this problem, I now perform a skin plasty with almost every bunionectomy. This technique removes excess skin and shapes the site to allow for smoother more natural contours and less scarring. This technique, which I refer to as the "Foot-lift: an Aesthetic Bunionectomy", has a very high success rate. The Foot-lift allows for a less noticeable scar and removes the unwanted thickened skin. It also helps reduce swelling which helps reduce the post-operative pain. In addition, it may help decrease the likelihood of bunion recurrence. The majority of the podiatric surgeons at our practice have now



adopted this technique.

The Foot-lift procedure is similar to a tummy tuck or a face-lift in which the excess skin is removed in toto. The remaining portions of healthy skin are then carefully undermined, stretched, and rotated as needed. Deep sutures are used to close the incision, but within the top-most superficial layers of skin, a fine suture is used, allowing for a seamless closure and minimal scarring. The level of pain in patients undergoing an aesthetic bunionectomy tends to be slightly less than that of the traditional bunionectomy. Less swelling in the foot means not only less pain, but also a quicker return to wearing shoes and resuming activity.

Most of the experts will warn you not to undergo this procedure for cosmetic purposes alone. You and your podiatrist together need to weigh the risks and benefits of any foot surgery.

Treatments for bunions have come a long way and bunion surgery may not involve all the pain and recovery time you imagine. Patients with large bunions tend to experience pain, and so, are therefore good candidates for the Foot-lift. **IMAGE**

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