Cosmetic genital surgery - labiaplasty and phalloplasty

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Female genital re-shaping, or labiaplasty, is performed to change the size and shape of the inner labia, the inner lips of the vulva. Penis enlargement or augmentation surgery (phalloplasty) is performed to increase penis length, girth or both. Labiaplasty and phalloplasty are not gender reassignment surgeries.

Talk with your surgeon about the risks and benefits of aesthetic genital surgery and what results you can expect.

Cosmetic genital surgery involves reshaping the labia, vulva or penis. Some people choose this surgery because they feel unhappy about the look of their genitals. An operation to change the look of the genitals is sometimes referred to as ‘aesthetic genital surgery’.

Female genital reshaping, or labiaplasty, aims to change the size and shape of the inner labia or the inner lips of the vulva. Penis enlargement or augmentation surgery (phalloplasty) is used to increase the length, width or both of the penis.

Labiaplasty and phalloplasty are not the same as gender reassignment surgeries.

If you are concerned about the way you look, or are thinking about cosmetic treatments to boost your confidence, there are alternatives. Another option is to accept yourself the way you are and realise that normal, healthy genitals come in a wide range of shapes and sizes.

Things to consider about cosmetic genital surgery

Before you choose cosmetic genital surgery, there are some important issues to keep in mind:

- Be aware that you will have scars. Although the scars may fade significantly with time, they will always be visible.
- Labiaplasty will not make the vagina smaller or tighter. This requires a different operation called a vaginoplasty.
- Phalloplasty can only increase the length or width of the penis shaft, not the head.
- Phalloplasty to lengthen the penis will only make the penis appear longer when flaccid – it will not be longer when erect.
- Think about the financial burden. Cosmetic surgery does not usually qualify for rebates from Medicare or private health insurance companies.
- Smokers are at increased risk of complications. If you are serious about undergoing cosmetic surgery, you should try to quit smoking.

Finding a surgeon to perform cosmetic genital surgery

You may want to ask your doctor for advice on a suitable and reputable doctor or hospital where cosmetic genital surgery is performed. At your first consultation, you should ask the surgeon about their training and experience. It is preferable to have this procedure done by a reputable professional who is specially trained to perform cosmetic genital surgery and has a lot of experience in carrying out this type of surgery.

Medical issues with cosmetic genital surgery

Before surgery, you need to discuss a range of medical issues with your doctor or surgeon including:

- Physical health – an examination will help your doctor or surgeon to decide if the treatment is appropriate.
- Medical history – some pre-existing conditions and surgeries you have had in the past may influence decisions about this operation, including the type of anaesthetic that is used.
- Psychiatric history – some surgeons may suggest or insist that you receive counselling before you consider cosmetic genital surgery.
- Risks and possible complications – it is important that you understand the risks and complications so that you can weigh up whether cosmetic genital surgery is right for you.
- Preparations and supplements – tell the surgeon about any that you take on a regular basis or have recently taken, including over-the-counter preparations such as fish oils and vitamin supplements.
- Past reactions to medications – tell the surgeon if you have ever had a bad reaction or a side effect from any medications including anaesthesia.
- Preparation for surgery – your surgeon will give you detailed instructions on what you should do at home to prepare for surgery. For example, you may be advised to take a particular medication or alter the dose of an existing medication. Follow all instructions carefully.

Details of cosmetic genital surgery

The details of the surgery will depend on individual factors, but generally include:

- Labiaplasty – the operation is usually performed to reduce the size of the labia minora (inner lips). General or local anaesthesia may be used. The surgeon
removes the unwanted tissue and remodels the labia into the desired size and shape. Alternatively, a wedge-shaped section of the labia is removed. Some surgeons use a laser instead of a scalpel to reduce bleeding. Occasionally, a labiaplasty is performed to reduce the size of the labia majora (outer lips). Some women choose to have surgery to tighten the vagina (vaginoplasty) during the same operation.

- Enlargement phalloplasty – this operation increases penis length. General or local anaesthesia may be used. The surgeon makes an incision (cut) at the base of the penis and cuts the ligament that attaches the penis to the body. This will cause the penis to extend out further from the body. The penis is not actually longer, but more of it is visible.
- Girth enlargement phalloplasty – this operation increases the width of the penis. General or local anaesthesia may be used. Using fatty tissue harvested (removed) from another part of your body, the surgeon may sew strips of fat underneath the skin of the penis (dermal fat grafting) or inject fat into the penis (fat transfer or fat transplant).
- Full phalloplasty – some men choose to have their penis increased in both length and girth during the same operation.

Immediately after cosmetic genital surgery

After the operation, you may expect:

- bruising and swelling
- possible numbness
- pain and discomfort
- to wear dressings or bandages.

Complications of cosmetic genital surgery

All surgery carries some degree of risk. Some of the possible complications of cosmetic genital surgery include:

- risks of general anaesthesia including allergic reaction, which may (rarely) be fatal
- surgical risks such as bleeding or infection
- scars that may be severe, raised, reddened and itchy
- unevenness – the labia may not be symmetrical
- permanent colour change to the labia
- nerve damage to the labia or penis, including permanent loss of sensation
- irregular shape to the penis following fat transfer
- impotence (inability to get or maintain an erection)
- tissue death along the wound or skin loss
- further surgery to treat complications.

This is not a complete list. For example, your medical history or lifestyle may put you at increased risk of certain complications. You need to speak to your surgeon for more information.

Self-care after cosmetic genital surgery

Recovery may take at least six weeks. Be guided by your surgeon, but general self-care suggestions include:

- Follow all instructions on looking after your wounds.
- Wear penile weights as directed for a few weeks after you have phalloplasty.
- Avoid sex for at least six weeks.
- Report any bleeding, severe pain or unusual symptoms to your surgeon.

Long-term outlook after cosmetic genital surgery

Scarring will be permanent, but should fade in time. Be patient. Improvements to scars may take around a year or so. The results of labiaplasty are permanent. If fat transfer has been used to widen the penis, this is not permanent and it will disappear over time, because the body tends to reabsorb about 50 per cent of the injected fat. Top-up injections may be required.

Following phalloplasty to lengthen the penis, the angle of the erection may be lower, but this should not affect sexual intercourse.

Alternatives to cosmetic genital surgery

Most people choose to have cosmetic genital surgery because they are unhappy with their appearance. If you are concerned about your appearance, talking to a counsellor or psychologist may help you overcome your concerns, and you may decide that you like yourself the way you are.

A good place to learn more about women’s genitals is The Labia Library. This website features a photo gallery showing real, unaltered images of women’s genitals and aims to help people understand that normal, healthy genitals come in a wide range of shapes and sizes.

Where to get help

- Your GP (doctor)
- Plastic surgeon
- Australian Society of Plastic Surgeons Information Hotline Tel. 1300 367 446
- Royal Australasian College of Surgeons Tel. (03) 9249 1200

References

- Plastic and Cosmetic Surgery, Medline Plts.
- Sexual health, Mayo Clinic.

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Surgery

The following content is displayed as Tabs. Once you have activated a link navigate to the end of the list to view its associated content. The activated link is defined as 'Active Tab'.

Types of surgery

- Types of surgery
- Exploratory surgery
- Blood, tissue and organ donation
- Plastic and cosmetic
- Reproductive and contraception
- A-Z of surgical procedures

Exploratory surgery

- Arthroscopy
  Most people can resume normal activities around three weeks after an arthroscopy.
- Biopsy
  Before a biopsy, you need to discuss a range of issues with your doctor or surgeon.
- Colonoscopy
  A colonoscopy can be used to look for cancer of the colon (bowel cancer) or colon polyps, which are growths on the lining of the colon.
- Endoscopy
  An endoscope or fibrescope is a long, usually flexible tube with a lens at one end and a video camera at the other.
- Laparoscopy
  The advantage of laparoscopy is that only a small incision is required, which is why it is also known as 'keyhole surgery'.

Blood, tissue and organ donation

- Blood donation
  Donated blood is used to help people who are sick or injured, or for medical research.
- Blood transfusion
  Donated blood is screened for blood-borne diseases such as hepatitis, syphilis and HIV.
- Corneal transplantation and donation
  Corneal transplant surgery would not be possible without generous donors and their families, who have donated corneal tissue so that others may see.
- Kidney donation
  Kidneys are often donated after death but more people are choosing to donate one of their kidneys while still alive (living kidney donation).
- Organ and tissue donation
  Discover the facts about organ and tissue donation, decide about becoming a donor and discuss your decision with the people close to you.
- Organ and tissue transplantation
  Transplantation varies depending on the transplant organ or tissue so speak with your medical team about surgical procedures, recovery and medications.

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Plastic and cosmetic

- **Abdominoplasty (tummy tuck)**
  A 'tummy tuck', or abdominoplasty, is cosmetic surgery to remove fat and excess loose skin from the abdomen...

- **Blepharoplasty (eyelid surgery)**
  Eyelid surgery, or blepharoplasty, aims to improve the appearance of the upper eyelids, lower eyelids or both...

- **Body contouring surgery**
  Body contouring is surgery to remove sagging skin and extra fat, and improve the shape and tone of underlying tissue...

- **Brachioplasty (arm lift surgery)**
  An 'arm lift' is surgery to reshape or reconstruct the underside of the upper arm from the armpit to the elbow...

- **Breast implants (augmentation)**
  Breast implants are inserted under the skin to create larger breasts...

- **Breast reduction for men**
  Breast reduction for men is surgery to correct overdeveloped or enlarged breasts...

- **Breast reduction for women**
  Breast reduction surgery removes excess breast fat, glandular tissue and skin to achieve a breast size in proportion with your body...

- **Brow lift**
  A brow lift is cosmetic surgery to correct a sagging forehead and repair frown lines...

- **Cosmetic genital surgery - labiaplasty and phalloplasty**
  Cosmetic genital surgery involves reshaping the labia, vulva or penis to alter their size or shape...

- **Cosmetic implants - buttock, fat and pectoral**
  Buttock and pectoral implants involve surgery to insert shaped silicone pieces into skin cavities...

- **Cosmetic surgery**
  Cosmetic surgery carries risks and, in some cases, the results are not what you may anticipate...

- **Cosmetic treatments - injectables**
  Cosmetic injections into the skin can be used to reduce wrinkles...

- **Ears - otoplasty**
  Ear correction surgery, or otoplasty, is usually done to move prominent ears closer to the head or to reduce the size of large ears...

- **Facelift (meloplasty)**
  A facelift is a type of cosmetic surgery that removes or tightens facial skin to make a person look younger...

- **Facial implants**
  Facial implants are used by people who want to restore or improve the normal shape of their face...

- **Hair transplant surgery**
  Hair transplant surgery involves taking skin from parts of the scalp where hair is growing and grafting it to the thinning or bald areas, or areas of trauma...

- **Liposuction**
  Liposuction is invasive surgery and is not a substitute for weight reduction or a cure for obesity...

- **Medical tourism and insurance**
  People may choose to travel overseas to seek medical or surgical treatment that is unavailable in their home country. This is called medical tourism, and it's a booming industry worldwide. People...

- **Nose - rhinoplasty**
  Rhinoplasty may be performed for cosmetic reasons or to correct a structural problem...

Reproductive and contraception
- **Assisted reproductive technology – IVF and ICSI**

  IVF (in-vitro-fertilization) and ICSI (intracytoplasmic sperm injection) are assisted reproductive treatment (ART) procedures in which fertilisation of an egg occurs outside the body.

- **Caesarean section**

  A caesarean section is usually performed when it is safer for the mother or the baby than a vaginal birth.

- **Contraception - tubal ligation**

  Sterilisation is a permanent method of contraception that a woman can choose if she is sure that she does not want children in the future.

- **Contraception - vasectomy**

  Having a vasectomy does not affect a man's ability to produce male sex hormones, enjoy sex or reach orgasm.

- **Dilatation and curettage (D&C)**

  A dilatation and curettage (D&C) is an operation performed on women to lightly scrape away the womb lining.

- **Hysterectomy**

  The conditions that prompt a hysterectomy can often be treated by other means, and hysterectomy should only be a last resort.

**A-Z of surgical procedures**

- **Abdominoplasty (tummy tuck)**

  A 'tummy tuck', or abdominoplasty, is cosmetic surgery to remove fat and excess loose skin from the abdomen.

- **Appendectomy**

  An appendectomy is usually carried out on an emergency basis to treat appendicitis.

- **Brachioplasty (arm lift surgery)**

  An 'arm lift' is surgery to reshape or reconstruct the underside of the upper arm from the armpit to the elbow.

- **Brain surgery**

  Brain surgery is performed for a number of reasons, including alterations in brain tissue, brain blood flow and cerebrospinal fluid.

- **Breast reconstruction and mastectomy**

  Some women choose to have breast reconstruction surgery to give a similar appearance to the look of their original breast in normal clothes.

- **Cosmetic implants - buttock, fat and pectoral**

  Buttock and pectoral implants involve surgery to insert shaped silicone pieces into skin cavities.

- **Craniotomy**

  A craniotomy is an operation to open the skull (cranium) in order to access the brain for surgical repair.

- **Endoscopy**

  An endoscope or fibrescope is a long, usually flexible tube with a lens at one end and a video camera at the other.

- **Eyes - laser eye surgery**

  During laser eye surgery, a computer-controlled laser is used to remove microscopic amounts of tissue from the front surface of the eye.

- **Hair transplant surgery**

  Hair transplant surgery involves taking skin from parts of the scalp where hair is growing and grafting it to the thinning or bald areas, or areas of trauma.

- **Heart bypass surgery**

  After heart bypass surgery, eat a wide variety of fresh fruit and vegetables, wholegrain cereals and cold-water fish.

- **Heart disease - angioplasty and stent procedures (video)**

  People with coronary heart disease talk about the medical procedures that followed their heart attack and diagnosis.

- **Kidneys - dialysis and transplant**

  People with kidney failure need dialysis or a transplant to stay alive.

- **Knee replacement surgery**

  Knee replacement surgery removes a diseased knee joint and replaces it with an artificial joint.
• **Laminectomy**

  A laminectomy is a surgical incision into the vertebra to obtain access to the spinal cord.

• **Laparotomy**

  A laparotomy is a surgical incision into the abdominal cavity used to examine the abdominal organs and aid diagnosis.

• **Myomectomy**

  A myomectomy is an operation performed to remove fibroids from the uterus.

• **Obesity surgery**

  Obesity surgery is not a form of cosmetic surgery, nor an alternative to good eating habits and regular exercise.

• **Tracheostomy**

  A tracheostomy is a surgical procedure that involves making a cut in the trachea (windpipe) and inserting a tube into the opening.

• **Transurethral resection of the prostate (TURP) - for benign prostate disease**

  Surgery on the prostate gland can have many side effects, including erectile problems and urinary incontinence.

**Related Information**

• **Breast implants (augmentation)**

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• **Breast reduction for women**

  Breast reduction surgery removes excess breast fat, glandular tissue and skin to achieve a breast size in proportion with your body.

• **Brow lift**

  A brow lift is cosmetic surgery to correct a sagging forehead and repair frown lines.

• **Facelift (rhytidoplasty)**

  A facelift is a type of cosmetic surgery that removes or tightens facial skin to make a person look younger.

• **Facial implants**

  Facial implants are used by people who want to restore or improve the normal shape of their face.

**Related information on other websites**

• [ASPS – Find a surgeon (in Australia) service](https://www.asps.org.au/)

• [Australian Society of Plastic Surgeons](https://www.asps.org.au/)

• [Informed consent – Queensland Health](https://www.health.qld.gov.au/)

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This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by: Australian Society of Plastic Surgeons

Last updated: January 2019

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