


BEAUTY

BY NICOLE SPARROW

spotlight on:

THE WAISTLINE

Whittle your waistline



Forget about sucking in your tummy to zip up your jeans – your flat stomach solutions are right here.

Ever found yourself poking your stomach and thinking, 'Huh. I wonder how that got there'? You're not alone.

Liposuction remains one of the most popular plastic surgery procedures worldwide. And it's not surprising that so many women have a love-hate relationship with their bellies, considering that everything from bloating to weight gain to post-pregnancy body changes can leave one seriously considering a full battalion of tummy-control undies.

But before you break out the Bridget Jones knickers, there are steps you can take to shrink your stomach. The first is to identify why your

waistline is expanding, in order to target your treatment. Some common culprits include:

- **Stress.** Assuming your muffin top isn't actually the result of eating too many muffins, one possible cause could be stress. It's known that elevated levels of the stress hormone cortisol cause abdominal weight gain over time.

- **Diet.** You might think you're jumping on the healthy-eating wagon by loading your diet with beans, lentils and wholewheat products, but if you're not drinking enough water they could leave you feeling bloated. If you're not used to a diet rich in fibre, rather introduce it slowly.
- **Digestive enzymes.** A lack of these little wonders can also result in

bloating, says Dr Ela Manga of the Woodlands Centre for Well Being & Spa in Johannesburg, who recommends supplementing with digestive enzymes, available from health shops and pharmacies.

• **Reproductive hormones.** You're probably already aware that PMS causes bloating but, says Manga, where the tummy-expanding effects of hormones really come into play is in the run-up to menopause, when a decline in oestrogen results in body fat shifting from the arms, legs and hips to the abdomen.

• **Pregnancy and rapid weight loss.** These can both leave behind loose skin and stretchmarks.

Once you've identified the cause behind your problem stomach area, you'll need to get in shape before embarking on any procedure to tighten the skin and tone the area, says Dr Maureen Allem of Skin Renewal Clinics. 'Suitable candidates [for these procedures] should be at their ideal body weight. An added advantage would be if they do some cardio activity three times a week and if they follow a healthy lifestyle.'

How to get in shape

To help eliminate flab on your tum, you could torture yourself with 1000 sit-ups each day, but experts will tell you that you can't spot-train an area. Rather start a gentle, all-round cardio and strength training regime, and give your efforts an added boost with products like

1. Nimue Body Contouring Gel R326, or **2. !QMS Medicosmetics Lift-o-Firm Body R750,** a contouring cream ideal for trouble zones, including the stomach. It contains fat-burning ingredients, including synephrine and L-carnitine. Plus it has added skin-firming benefits, as does **3. Phytomer Ab Sculptor R885.** Ingredients like maritime pine bark help the natural elimination of fat from the waistline.

If pregnancy has taken its toll on your six-pack, Mama Mio Bootcamp

for Tummies R1390, is a complete pampering kit to help you get back into shape. The products are used in combination with a four-minutes-a-day exercise routine to ensure results aren't just skin-deep.

If bloating is bugging you, Thalgo recently launched **Flat Stomach R367.** This supplement contains marine and botanical extracts that reduce that feeling of discomfort due to bloating. Green clay helps absorb toxins and gasses, and because of its antacid properties, *Lithothamnion* (a type of seaweed) improves intestinal comfort.

A little extra help

Once you're at your ideal body weight, there are options to tighten and improve loose abdominal skin (depending on the initial condition of the skin), says Allem. 'If there is a lot of excess skin then one would have to surgically remove it.' However, if your tummy is only slightly stretched and loose, there are non-invasive skin-tightening procedures, she says.

Titan uses infra-red light to heat the skin and contract the collagen fibres lying deep in the skin. Ideally, you'd need three of these procedures, three months apart, to see results.

'A radiofrequency procedure such as Accent uses deep dermal (skin) heating to physically shrink the collagen fibres. You'll need one treatment a week

for six to eight weeks for best results with this non-invasive procedure.'

To tighten up loose, crepey skin, Allem also recommends carboxy-therapy. This involves blowing carbon dioxide under the skin through a needle, which sends oxygenated blood to the area, and this stimulates collagen production to tighten up the skin. It's especially good for stretch marks after pregnancy, she says, and recommends six to eight treatments, two weeks apart. To achieve optimum results you may need a combination of these types of treatments, so discuss your concerns with the doctor or clinic during your consultation.

Even slim women struggle with stubborn abdominal fat that no number of stomach crunches seems to shift. In this case liposuction could be an option. However, cautions Allem, lipo isn't a short-cut to weight loss. Plus, there are less invasive treatments like lipolysis, where a substance like lecithin is injected into fatty deposits; this breaks down the fat, which is then eliminated by the body. ♣

PHOTOGRAPHS: INFRA, SUPPLIED

TOOL KIT

While exercise and a low-fat diet remain the healthiest (and most effective) ways to reduce belly fat, there are plenty of clever products available to give you a helping hand.

