



A smart decision: How incorporating Smartlipo™ has enhanced my cosmetic surgery practice

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I first became intrigued about laser lipolysis after seeing an article about Cynosure's Smartlipo technology in a popular consumer publication. Not only did it sound different, but it seemed like there would be a strong future for it in plastic surgery procedures.

I'm always searching for new ways to gain an "edge" in the surgical technologies I offer my patients, and I was extremely eager to learn more about it. I was the first to use power-assisted liposuction in my area and now virtually everyone uses it. It's like adding power steering to your liposuction.

After I purchased Smartlipo and received my training, I was able to easily incorporate it into my power-assisted liposuction practice. Now that I've successfully used Smartlipo on more than 150 patients and approximately 1000 areas, I thought

it would be helpful to share my experience—including the factors that influenced my decision process to add Smartlipo to my practice.

Safety and efficacy are paramount

Of course, safety and efficacy are the two things you want to be sure about before you bring any new technology into your practice. I put a lot of credence into the fact that Smartlipo was the first laser lipolysis system to receive FDA clearance. The fact that it is specifically indicated for laser lipolysis, and wasn't being used off-label, was also very reassuring. When patients invariably ask me "is a procedure safe?" I can tell them that the FDA is more discriminating and evaluates with more scrutiny than any other regulatory body in the world. I don't have to go and prove that it's safe and efficacious—it's inherent.

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How Smartlipo™ fits in my practice

When I began using Smartlipo, I used it as a beginning tool prior to performing traditional liposuction. Then I decided to inject the tumescent fluid and suction first basically to de-bulk the area and use Smartlipo as a finishing tool for most of my procedures. It just made sense to deflate or de-bulk the area first, then do the tightening at the end.

Loose skin is what makes people look old. But I've had many patients who don't have enough loose skin to justify taking a surgical approach. Early in my practice, I would tell these patients to come back in ten years. With Smartlipo, I can offer this type of patient something that can help them now, without having to turn them away from my practice. I don't know of anything else that can deliver heat in specific areas and induce tightening like Smartlipo.

I used to use Thermage®, which was a good approach, but found it didn't make a huge difference in some people. With Thermage, the skin was cold and the layers underneath were heated. It was like putting a pane of glass over a target area and trying to hit the target without breaking the glass.

With Smartlipo, I can come in at a distant site and the laser will heat the areas I want to attack from underneath.

Skin-tightening results — without surgery

Two areas that traditionally have been challenging are the back of the arms and the inner thighs. The inner thigh is the most difficult area: the skin is thinner and if you deflate the inner thigh, there is skin laxity. The skin on the back of the under-arm stretches with age and you can potentially make it look worse by liposuctioning and deflating without skin retraction. For these patients, I can offer Smartlipo with a small incision and a quick recovery. If it tightens their skin enough to make them happy, then we've avoided the long scar and long recovery from brachioplasty.

This also applies to women post-childbirth who have firm abdominal muscles, but have some loose skin and mildly prominent stretch marks. In the past, the only procedure we could offer was a tummy-tuck. Now I can offer Smartlipo as an option to tighten the skin and improve stretch marks without the need for a more invasive procedure.

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The ideal Smartlipo™ patient

A typical patient is someone who does not have large deposits of fat. For women who are bothered by having a little bit of fat in front of the armpit, regular liposuction is too aggressive. If you attempt to liposuction this minimal amount of fat, you could cause a lot of trauma and divots. Smartlipo is able to move into the area and shave it down quite nicely without suction. It's great for delicate removal or reduction of fat.

Another use is for patients who have had liposuction in the past and have little irregularities, little ridges, or raised areas that weren't successfully treated. If you used traditional liposuction to correct this, you could end up making the area worse. Smartlipo is more delicate and precise—I simply mark the top of each of the ridges and shave it down very lightly. With Smartlipo, you also have the added benefit of heat and contraction, and collagen production.

A lot of physicians will liposuction with a large cannula and then continue with a much smaller cannula for smoothing. I think of Smartlipo and traditional liposuction as a viola and a cello. They are two very different instruments in an orchestra and you can't expect one to do the job of another. Sometimes you need to use both and they can work well together.

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Achieving the right balance

When I use Smartlipo™, I use the joules as a guide to the amount of energy I want to deliver, but hold my hand over the area being treated to monitor the temperature of the skin. If I feel I'm beyond a point that feels comfortable, I'll stop prematurely. For example, after putting 3000 joules in, the skin feels pretty warm and I stop at that point rather than trying to push it to an absolute number. It's like turning on a shower in the morning; you may have to turn the dial one way or another to get to a comfortable temperature. "Safety first" is always my mantra.

I use the same amount of tumescent when Smartlipo is part of the procedure. I work with a ratio of 1 to 1. If I inject 500 cc, I'll remove 500 cc. When you infiltrate with tumescent fluid, the fluid as well as the fat can be a big insulator of heat. If you laser first, it takes longer for the tissue to develop a higher temperature because of this insulating effect. If you use the laser as a finishing tool, you are suctioning out the tumescence and fat and there is not as much of an insulating effect. More heat is delivered faster, and I believe you achieve a more powerful tightening effect.

I perform most Smartlipo procedures in the operating room. I can treat small areas in my office, but if a patient wants more than one area done, I'm more comfortable using general anesthesia in the hospital setting. Stretching tissue and injecting tumescent is painful, and I find that if you're working with deep pockets of fat in the hips and flanks, it's difficult to suction these areas under local anesthesia.

A cost-effective decision

I know that Smartlipo is making a big difference in my procedures because my results are much better than they have ever been. I can honestly say that when I look at my income figures, it certainly did pay for itself. Smartlipo is an additional tool that is making what we can offer, in terms of liposuction, better. **And in the end, I feel I'm offering more value for my patients.**

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