

Long-term benefit of liposuction in patients with lipoedema: a follow-up study after an average of 4 and 8 years

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Summary

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Accepted for publication

2 November 2015

Funding sources

None.

Conflicts of interest

None declared.

DOI 10.1111/bjd.14289

Background Long-term results following liposuction in patients with lipoedema are available only for an average period of 4 years.

Objective To find out whether the improvement of complaints persists for a further 4 years.

Methods In a single-centre study, 85 patients with lipoedema had already been examined after 4 years. A mail questionnaire – often in combination with clinical controls – was repeated after another 4 years (8 years after liposuction).

Results Compared with the results after 4 years, the improvement in spontaneous pain, sensitivity to pressure, oedema, bruising and restriction of movement persisted. The same held true for patient self-assessment of cosmetic appearance, quality of life and overall impairment. Eight years after surgery, the reduction in the amount of conservative treatment (combined decongestive therapy, compression garments) was similar to that observed 4 years earlier.

Conclusion These results demonstrate for the first time the long-lasting positive effects of liposuction in patients with lipoedema.

What's already known about this topic?

- The longest follow-up studies after liposuction performed in patients with lipoedema were performed over an average period of 4 years.

What does this study add?

- This study adds new information concerning specific complaints after an average period of 8 years following liposuction in patients with lipoedema.
- These complaints include oedema, spontaneous pain, sensitivity to pressure, bruising, restriction of movement, cosmetic impairment and reduction in quality of life.

Lipoedema, a disease seen mainly by dermatologists, phlebologists and lymphologists, occurs only in women and is characterized by a circumscribed increase of subcutaneous fatty tissue accompanied by oedema, pain and bruising. Apart from conservative treatment to reduce oedema [combined decongestive therapy (CDT) comprising manual lymphatic drainage (MLD) and compression garments or bandages], the guidelines for lipoedema of the German Society of Phlebology¹ include surgical treatment (liposuction) to reduce fatty tissue.

Despite convincing short-term results,^{2–5} only one long-term study on liposuction for lipoedema treatment has been

conducted to date. A follow-up study conducted by our working group in 2010 showed that in 112 patients who had undergone liposuction, the circumscribed accumulations of subcutaneous fatty tissue, which in many cases were disfiguring, had disappeared an average of 3 years and 8 months after liposuction (range 1 year and 1 month to 7 years and 4 months). Furthermore, a distinct reduction in oedema typical of lipoedema was observed, along with a reduction in spontaneous pain, sensitivity to pressure and bruising. This in turn improved restriction of movement, cosmetic impairment and quality of life, as well as the