

DESIGNER SIZING

THE TRUTH BEHIND VAGINAL SURGERIES

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“Everyone I know complains about their body after they’ve had a baby,” says one-time model, Gina Bartelt, mother of three who lives in Tustin Ranch and looks 28, though she’s actually ten years older.

“I have girlfriends who’ve had consultations for breast lifts and tummy tucks and I have girlfriends who’ve actually gone through with it. The ones who’ve done it all say it was worth the pain and expense.”

Gina, who is considering a consultation herself, works-out five days a week, “But my breasts and stomach will never be the same no matter what I do. I’ve gained and lost 50 lbs. three times. My skin is loose.”

And yet, though all three of Gina’s children were delivered vaginally, when asked if she or any of her friends have complained of vaginal laxity, she hesitates. “I’ve never heard any of my girlfriends complain about that, but I don’t know if that’s because they’re embarrassed. I’m a little different than before, but it’s nothing I would ever have surgery for.”

Gina Bartelt is among the majority of women who have no problem according to Dr. Red M. Alinsod, of South Coast Urogynecology in Laguna Beach, “But 25 to 30% are unhappy with their sex life following one or more vaginal deliveries. And most of them want to be a size two again. That’s two as in two fingers,” he says, describing the approximate diameter of the average 21-year-old’s vagina.

Dr. Alinsod, who is double Fellowed at the American College of OB/GYN and the American College of Surgeons and has enough letters behind his name to half-fill a scrabble board, was one of the first doctors in the country to perform a vaginoplasty - the plastic-reconstructive procedure whereby excess vaginal skin is cut and re-sewn- back in 1990. Today he's the only doctor in Orange County to perform Vaginal Reconstruction on a regular basis.

"Kegel exercises are worthless when it comes to tightening the vagina," he says. "They're an incontinence exercise that won't help women who have loose skin after delivering many or large babies." The only way back to a size two is surgery.

For some however, even a two is too big. Those few are in the market for what's known as 'Designer Vaginas'.

"Women have come in and requested the procedure although they've never had any children and they don't need it," says Ryan Stanton, M.D., of the Modern Institute of Plastic Surgery and Anti Aging in Beverly Hills. "Some women want it excessively small either to custom fit a partner or for professional reasons."

"Some patients will come in with pictures of Playboy centerfolds as examples of what they're looking for," says Dr. Stanton who is struck by the number of OC residents opting for cosmetic surgery over the last five years. "The increase is tremendous; far more than in Beverly Hills."

While the vast majority of Dr. Stanton's female patients age 25 to 35 are in for breast augmentation and liposuction, and, like Gina, about 1 out of 4 of those attribute their dissatisfaction with their appearance to post partum issues, Stanton says he's seen a 30% increase in requests for vaginoplasty over the last

ten years. "It still only makes up about 1 % of all cosmetic surgery procedures though."

According to Laguna based Dr. Alinsod, a typical patient is not in for a Designer Vagina, but one who's done having children and complains of no longer being able to feel her husband. "Sometimes they do it as an anniversary present to themselves and their husbands."

"We'd been married 17 years and had a happy, healthy sex life, but this made it 1000 times better," says Barbara, who had the procedure performed by Dr. Alinsod three years ago.

"I don't use Botox or Restylane and I'm not a Laguna beach house-wife trying to fight the aging process," Barbara says, "But I was having surgery for stress incontinence, so I decided why not have this done too since I had to go under general anesthesia anyway."

In conjunction with the vaginoplasty, Barbara also had a labiaplasty performed which involves surgery to the labia minora (the inner lips). The result of the two procedures is a tighter fit and an aesthetically pleasing contour according to Dr. Alinsod.

Theresa of La Mirada, had labiaplasty performed three months ago, after worrying for several years that she didn't look like other women.

"Two years ago, my sister-in-law, who'd just had pubic laser hair removal with a friend, mentioned noticing that her friend had long inner labia that hung down below the outer labia and how she'd never seen that. She wanted to know if that was what happened after you had children," says Theresa, who claims her sister-in-law then proceeded to "Show off her own perfect looking vagina."

“She said she thought all women looked like her and that she couldn’t imagine any man wanting to get near a woman who looked like her friend.” That’s when Theresa looked into labiaplasty.

“I’m very pleased with the results,” says Theresa who, after discussing it with her husband, plans to return to Dr. Alinsod in a year for a vaginoplasty.

Unlike Theresa, Barbara, a nurse, never felt that her appearance might be unusual, fully understanding the degree to which female genitalia varies. “I’ve catheterized hundreds of women over the years and I can tell you that very few look like the playboy centerfolds. Some women want to look a certain way though.”

But not many know such surgical options exist and the few who do aren’t sending out announcements once they’ve taken the plunge.

To make matters worse, if you type in V-A-G-I-N-O-P-L-A-S-T-Y on the web, the first thing to come up is ‘Male to Female Sexual Reassignment Surgery’. “It’s a sexual reversal operation,” Dr. Alinsod explains, which clarifies some of the horrifying risks one sees surfing online, i.e. *Death* (from massive blood loss) and *Hair* (some patients reported growth inside the new vagina).

“You don’t want to confuse the two,” he add, “Which is why they came up with the marketing term ‘Vaginal Rejuvenation’ about seven years ago.”

Type in V-A-G-I-N-A-L R-E-J-U-V-E-N-A-T-I-O-N and there are several sites that come up, many replete with before and after photos of both vaginoplasties and labiaplasties – though for some the photos might serve as an appetite suppressant, rather than inspiration. And then there’s the cost.

While the average breast lift is \$4,000.00, according to the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery, and a tummy-tuck averages about \$7000.00; a labiaplasty is \$5,000.00 and a vaginoplasty costs \$6,000.00

“But if you do the two together it’s \$10,000.00,” says Dr. Alinsod. When it comes to Vaginal Rejuvenation, apparently the whole is less than the sum of its parts.

Which brings up an important question: At the risk of sounding crude (is it possible we haven’t yet?) shouldn’t the *hole* be *more* than just the sum of its parts? Isn’t the female genitalia mysterious, miraculous, indeed sacred and to some beautiful, regardless of its particular anatomical configuration, but simply because it defines who we are, how we fit into the eternal cog of propagation whether we use it as a vessel for new life or not? Or is the need to feel feminine and desirable according to some well accepted standard so important to a woman’s sense of self that it necessitates pursuing what some see as genital mutilation?

“To those who consider this mutilation, I would never try to change their minds. I don’t make value judgments with regard to critics, but about ¼ to 1/3 of all women have labia minora which extends past the labia majora and that can be extremely uncomfortable,” says Dr. Alinsod, who saw this condition as a general OB/GYN before switching to Vaginal Reconstruction. With regard to vaginoplasty, few can fault a couple for wanting to improve their sex life.

As for complications, Dr. Stanton claims that while not technically difficult to perform; a vaginoplasty -which is actually a highly tailored modification of a common procedure known as a posterior repair - may need revision because it can be difficult to meet expectations. “It’s one of those things that can be hard to know what you want until you have it.”

Curious? Go measure yourself. After all, maybe that's the first step in what this really is: A liberating example of one of the ways women are taking sexual pleasure into their own hands....so to speak.