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HEALTH

SKIN DEEP



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POSTED BY: Editors
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I'm about to embark on a physically altering adventure of which the results may not be known for several weeks. The change might be dramatic or minor. And there's the highly unlikely

chance it could fail — in which case let it be said that I put my all into my career.

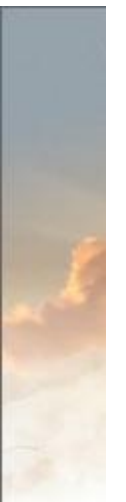
I am about to undergo elective body-altering cosmetic surgery.

As a man I'm expected to underplay the importance of my appearance. If I'm to grow a paunch then I'm to do so, if not proudly, then certainly without concern, without complaint, and without conceit.

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I did consider this while on a recent vacation on a Mexican beach. I saw a lot of men happily strutting their protruded bellies with the pride of an expectant mother. They'd slap their tummies with satisfaction, lathering them with suntan lotion, attending to them as if at any moment the rounded globes of flesh would roll off to play in the sun and the sand all on their own.

I doubt I could ever attribute such paternal affection towards my extra bulk.

I've always maintained a reasonable weight through a healthy diet and keeping active. I go to the gym and do my best to avoid foods that list glucose and fructose as ingredients. All that's fine when you're young and have a metabolism that burns faster than a California brush fire.

Then comes 50.

I'm doing well *for someone my age* (a caveat that has its own implications). Women are still kind enough to flirt with me, my wife still finds me attractive and my career as an on-air television host, which has yet to demand me to remove my shirt, continues to flourish. But the ugly truth is, I look better with my clothes on.

There was a time when I was proud of my body. Now, I'm proud of my wardrobe.

My belly is the biggest *offender*, jutting out slightly over my belt like I'm being hugged from behind by a sumo wrestler. My chest, which once gave my upper torso perkiness begins with promise but then bails out like an exhausted marathon runner. And I'm sorry to have to be this graphic, but my nipples now have all the symmetry of an iguana with lazy eyes.

I promised I would never let my body get like this and yet here I am. I still exercise and watch my diet, but it's like trying to pay down an extremely high Visa bill — you get rid of the interest but none of the premium.

So it's back to aging gracefully the way nature intended. Problem is, I've never known nature to be all that graceful. And I doubt nature counted on cheeseburgers, Belgian beer and a constant reminder that we share the planet with the likes of George Clooney and Johnny Depp.

No, I had never even considered elective cosmetic surgery.

I make an appointment with **Dr. Peter Bray**, one of Toronto's leading cosmetic surgeons, at his clinic. Dr. Bray wants to tell me about an advance form cosmetic surgery called **BodyTite**, which he claims to be less intrusive, less risky and offer better results than previous forms of liposuction.

I tell myself that it'll be just an informational meeting, but as soon as I enter the appointment in my calendar I begin to envision the possibility of returning to the body I once had.



A few days later, I arrive at Dr. Bray's Yorkville office in Toronto and home of *Elements* — a wellness and medispa. The statue of a Tibetan Buddha stands outside the door welcoming in the plump, the wrinkled, the cosmetically hopeful.

I am met by Paulette, a woman of an undefinable age, whose energy and warmth defy any preconceived ideas I had about the exclusive nature of cosmetic surgery. She takes me to the waiting lounge, where the furniture is of a cool modern



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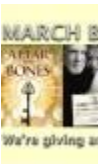
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design, leather brushing against tile, brushing against chrome. Flames rise from a gas fireplace, not giving off a great deal of heat but adding warm comfort. Cell phones are required to be turned off and voices are kept low. On the coffee table are the bibles of privilege and beauty — a Tom Ford photo book, the works of Herb Ritt, a photo journal on modern architecture.

I flip through the Tom Ford book, impressed by his most recent success as a filmmaker. Suddenly, I'm struck by an inexplicable feeling of self-consciousness. My salt-stained boots seem out of place and my ski jacket, which I once thought to be pretty damn trendy, is now just a big puffy orange embarrassment.

A strikingly beautiful woman enters the room, blonde and still sporting a vacation tan. I can tell she's a patient, which makes me immediately curious as to what she has changed or what she hopes to change. She glances at me and I can only believe she's thinking the same thing, only that with me there is more to work with.

Then I recognize what we seen in each other — our vanity. I have always accepted that I was vain. I've just never been this upfront about it before.



I could leave now. But I don't. Sure, vanity ranks pretty high on the list of seven deadly sins, but I much prefer it over gluttony or greed.

The young woman and I do not exchange smiles. There is a reason why people wish to remain anonymous when here.

Paulette returns and takes me to Dr. Bray's conference room. From the window is a view of a park where people watch their dogs run through the snow. A picture of a reclining nude takes up most of one wall, a young woman altered slightly by the cubist style imposed by the photographer.

Dr. Bray enters. He's a young man, in good shape who clearly has no issue with maintaining a presentable and groomed appearance. He is soft spoken and thoughtful.

I approach the meeting as a journalist, not a potential client. He describes BodyTite as a major advancement in cosmetic body-restructuring. It's liposuction, he says, with the negatives removed. It's still, quite plainly, sucking out the fat from your body, but this time the recovery rate is faster, the procedure is safer, and the results are better.

It works like this: the needle insertions are smaller than with past procedures, leaving only tiny marks behind. The fat is heated, but regulated to a certain temperature so that it does not heat up too much (has such a thing ever happened before?). The heat also serves as a way of tightening, the result of which is that there is no excess skin left hanging once the fat is gone.

After giving my torso a thorough once-over where ever inch of my flab, fat and excess is pinched and measured, he tells me I'm a good candidate for the procedure: I'm healthy, my weight doesn't fluctuate drastically, and I'm at the right age. Of course there will be several blood tests, blood pressure and an ECG to undergo.

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It's a \$7,000 to \$10,000 procedure. Dr. Bray offers me the chance to try it for myself. Paulette, who assisted in the examination, doesn't say anything but I sense she thinks I can stand to lose a few pounds here and there.

And just like that, I'm in.

Watch for the second part of the series, *SKIN DEEP*, next Thursday where our intrepid writer arrives at the clinic for surgery.

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