



## Plastic surgery: Would you pay to get your pre-baby body back??

Today's  
Parent

By Lola Augustine Brown | Today's Parent – Wed, 12 Sep, 2012 11:26 AM EDT



Giving birth to and **nursing** my daughter for two years **wrecked my body**. I have a shelf of flab above my C-section scar, and my droopy boobs stare at the floor. I know plenty of my friends feel the same way, and every time I flip through a trashy magazine, I envy the celebrity moms who likely had their **post-baby bodies** reshaped before they even delivered their placenta.

### The "surgical mommy makeover" trend

I dream of getting a surgical mommy makeover, an instant fix to recover my figure and self-confidence. Admit it — you've thought about it, too. This is why I find myself in my panties in a room at a clinic in Toronto. Plastic surgeon Peter Bray is prodding my stomach and lifting my breasts. I don't usually show off these parts of myself, and feel a little grotesque, but that's why I'm here, right?

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As well as working in his posh private clinic, Bray is a staff plastic surgeon at Toronto Western Hospital, and an assistant professor at the University of Toronto. "Around 40 percent of what I do in my private practice is mommy makeovers," he says, "which is what we tend to call a tummy tuck and breast lift-augmentation combo."

### The tummy tuck

I'm apparently a great candidate for a tummy tuck with a bit of liposuction. When you get a tuck, your surgeon basically cuts out the loose floppy skin and stitches you back together. If you get liposuction, too, they remove the wobbly fat that you can grab on your stomach and extends towards your hips (goodbye love handles). "All the loose floppy stuff there that you can grab hold of — gone!" he says, grasping generous handfuls of my stomach. "Think of it being tighter, smoother and a better shape from under the bottom of your rib cage right down to your C-Section scar." Hallelujah.

### **The boob job**

As for my boobs, he suggests a breast lift. And as I'm already rather gifted in the boob department, there's no need for me to get implants in order to have sufficient volume. He can just cut out some excess skin and a small amount of sagging tissue, cut around my nipple and move it up, then sew it around the non-saggy breast tissue that I already have, but higher up on my chest, taking away the droop. Bray tells me this always carries a risk of decreased sensitivity, but it's usually temporary and minimal.

### **How much does it cost?**

Getting a tummy tuck and boob lift done here could set me back about \$16,000. (Getting implants instead of a lift would cost about the same, depending on the implants you choose.) The ballpark figure in most major Canadian cities is about \$12,000 to \$15,000, but you can get it done cheaper in some places. It's about the same price as the used car I bought last year. And just like with the car, I could get financing to cover the cost of the operation — there are glossy brochures at the reception desk advertising the services of two financing companies set up purely for surgical procedures.

And after looking through before-and-after pictures of women that Bray has performed mommy makeovers on, I am sold. The women's bodies look amazing, taken from destroyed to perfect, and my body isn't nearly as broken looking as theirs were — imagine how great it would make me look!

### **After-surgery effects**

Not that I'd look perfect, or like I hadn't had surgery. The tuck would leave me with a smiley-face scar running from hip to hip below my pan line. There would be lollipop-shaped scars on my breasts from where he'd have to cut around my nipple and reposition it. But, fully clothed, or even in a skimpy bikini, I'd look fab.

If I go for the whole shebang, Bray says that I'd be out of action for two to three weeks, meaning that I wouldn't be able to lift my five-year-old, would only be able to do light housework and wouldn't be able to do anything too strenuous. It's the tummy part that requires the biggest recovery, up to six weeks (every woman recovers differently), and the discomfort would probably be like that of a C-section.

In my case, because the tuck would be on the larger side and would require a pretty significant amount of supplemental liposuction, he'd likely use gross drainage tubes that would be inserted into my flesh just below the incision to collect the buildup of fluid that often occurs after this operation. They'd be taken out within a few days post-op if all went well. In some other women, he would just need to use a series of special sutures to prevent fluid collection.

### **Can you have kids after surgery?**

But there's one snag: I want more kids. Bray says that I need to wait until I've finished. "We can do all this great work, but once you get pregnant it would undo a lot of it."

### **Weighing the risks**

Going through the consultation process made me feel like getting a mommy makeover wouldn't be that big a deal — provided you can afford it, of course. But we're still talking about major surgery, and there are risks associated with going under anaesthetic, blood clots and infection. In 2008, mom of two Ashish Toews got a tummy tuck and liposuction at a private

clinic in Calgary, and died from complications 13 days later.

### **Finding the right surgeon**

We have to do our homework and carefully choose who will slice and dice us. Look for recommendations from friends, and ensure that your chosen doctor is a board-certified plastic surgeon — you don't actually have to be certified as a plastic surgeon to perform cosmetic surgery in Canada. Any surgeon must be observed and reviewed by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada to ensure basic safe standards, but, as Bray says: "The quality of the results is another matter." You can also check the doctor out on [ratemds.com](http://ratemds.com) — you'll see frank (albeit anonymous) opinions from people who have used a doctor's services.

### **The feminist perspective**

As an educated woman and casual feminist, though, I do have some reservations. There's a part of me that disagrees with the concept of cosmetic surgery, thinks it's silly and vain, and revels in those pictures of surgeries gone wrong on sites like [awfulplasticsurgery.com](http://awfulplasticsurgery.com).

Cressida J. Heyes, co-editor of *Cosmetic Surgery: A Feminist Primer*, and Canada research chair in *Philosophy of Gender and Sexuality* at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, says that although this type of surgery has been made normal, that isn't a good thing. "We typically invest a lot of energy in telling young girls to feel OK about what they look like, and in challenging the tyranny of 'the beauty myth.' But when we turn 18, suddenly everything is a matter of 'free choice' and 'being your best self.' Why?"

Although a lot of women I know love the idea of the mommy makeover, it isn't a universal feeling that our post-baby bodies need to be fixed. There are those who refer to stretch marks as "tiger stripes" earned by being a fierce momma. "What's to fix?" says Vancouver mom of two Tara Dickson. "We really need to let go of this perfect body image obsession. Post-baby bodies are beautiful! The stretching and pulling was a result of the miraculous task of creating another human being."

By trying to get back our figures, are we being unfair to ourselves, and feeding the machine that says we need to be perfect as well as be breeders? Is it wrong that these procedures are seen as no big deal? There certainly doesn't seem to be much stigma attached to getting them done (although two of the moms interviewed for this story wanted to use pseudonyms, they both admitted to being open with their friends and family). Are we empowered by getting this done, or buying into the idea that we need to raise kids and have a figure like Heidi Klum?

### **Embracing our bodies**

The fact is, although of course we are proud of having kids, plenty of us aren't embracing our post-baby bodies. Especially those who've worked hard to lose the baby weight but found that even if we do, we still look like we're carrying a fanny pack. And it isn't just a case of doing sit-ups — if their abs didn't go back together properly after giving birth, many women are unable to exercise that stomach flat, and no amount of Pilates can fix a C-section shelf.

### **Case studies**

Before having kids, 37-year-old Melanie Dawes\* made an arrangement with her husband that she'd be putting her body back together on the operating table afterward. "My skin was so stretched out, that even when there was no fat my belly just hung there," she says. And her breasts? "I felt like my kids had sucked the life out of them. They were totally deflated. I'd lay on the bed and there would be more boob resting on the bed than on my chest. I looked like a 70-year-old woman."

Dawes got her boobs done first, then followed with a tummy tuck a few years later. After breast lift surgery, she felt instantly beautiful. "Being able to put on a bra without having to lift, tuck and reposition things was amazing, as was **having sex with my husband** and having my breasts face the right way," she says. The surgery was easy to recover from; she felt like

her normal self 48 hours post-op, and was intimate with her hubby within the first week.

The tummy tuck was more painful. "It took six weeks before I felt anything like normal," she says. But once the swelling went down and she slid on her skinny jeans for the first time, she was ecstatic. "I remember thinking: 'is is what I used to look like!'" Dawes has no regrets, and her only lasting side effect is an area of numbness about the size of a tennis ball under her belly button.

Until she had her recent tummy tuck, Wanda Dewling (who has two grown sons and lives in Halifax) never really let her new husband see her twice-ravaged-by-C-section belly. "My scars ran vertical instead of horizontal, and, to be graphic, it looked like a bum with big blob of skin on each side of the scar," she says. "I no longer feel like I have to cover up if we're in bed and he flicks the lights on."

### **Self-esteem surgery**

Women seeking this surgery don't seem to be trying to look like anyone else, or to be perfect, but instead they're fixing what they feel is a physical deformity that's affecting their self-esteem, not to mention their relationships with their mates. "I went for a very natural look, I don't look like a stripper," says Karen Murphy,\* who got a breast lift and a tummy tuck. "My whole goal was to look how I looked before."

Although the surgery is potentially risky, painful and very expensive, there are a lot of women who are choosing to get a mommy makeover. In theory, I love the idea of getting my body back in order, but will I do it? I need to think on it further, especially as I just found out I'm pregnant, and Lord knows what kind of a number this next little bundle of joy will do to my body.

*\*Name has been changed.*

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