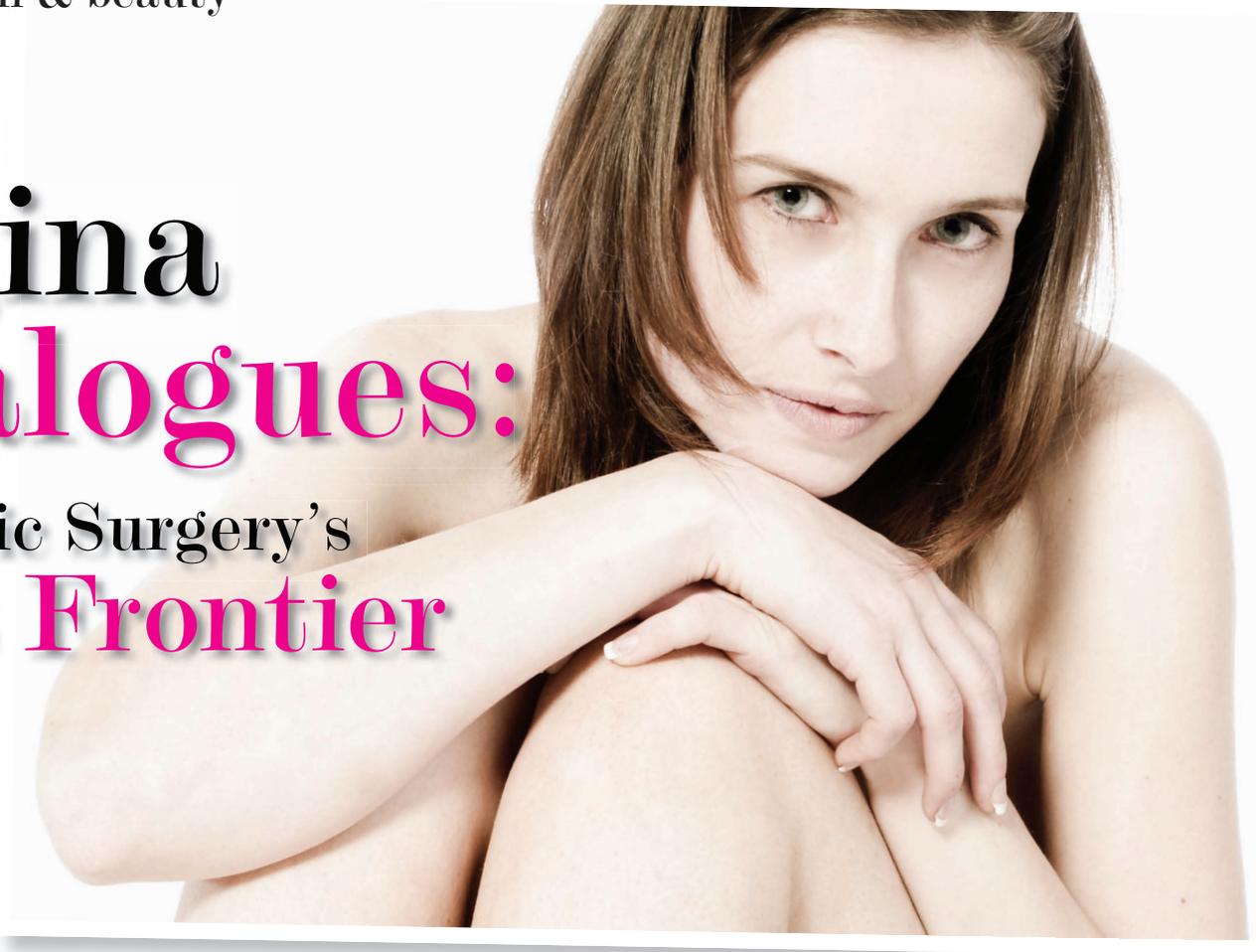


# Vagina Dialogues: Cosmetic Surgery's Last Frontier



Every external part of the human body has been a subject of aesthetic contouring. As millions of women have noses reshaped, breasts augmented, buttocks lifted and unwanted fat sucked away, a growing number are now exploring a new frontier: genital aesthetic surgery. Xavier Mmono, a consultant in obstetrics and gynaecology from the Courthouse cosmetic surgery clinic, reveals more

**T**here is an ever-growing trend to tighten vaginal muscles, plump up or shorten labia, liposuction the pubic area and even restore the integrity of the hymen for so-called cultural reasons. The reasons for this increasing interest in genital aesthetic surgery are multiple. Some women are unhappy about the appearance of their labia minora (inner vaginal lips). On the other hand, the ravages of time, childbirth and the effects of gravity conspire with other factors, such as chronic coughing, smoking and chronic constipation, to eventually lead some women to seek medical help.

## The brave new world... Are private parts no longer private?

Television programmes like *Sex and the City* have now helped to bring aesthetic surgery and female sexuality into the open. Women have the contraceptive pill and are soon to have their very own libido-enhancing patch. A lot more women now describe themselves as bisexual or bicurious and are willing to explore sex beyond its reproductive function.

Images of flimsy underwear, pubic hair sculpturing and nudity are becoming ever more common in the media. Not only are women now less inhibited, they are able to make comparisons. They also know an increasing number of friends who have had cosmetic surgery, and are more prepared to change those aspects of themselves that they are not happy with, whether that be through laser eye surgery, breast augmentation or vaginoplasty.

## What's on the menu...?

There is an overlap between procedures done for apparent medical indications and those done for purely aesthetic reasons. The catch all phrase people have become accustomed to is 'vaginal rejuvenation' or 'designer vaginas'. In reality, vaginal rejuvenation is a marketing term referring to vaginoplasty, where the vaginal canal and introitus (opening) are tightened. Surgery usually entails a modification of a standard gynaecological procedure called posterior repair, along with perineorrhaphy — the rebuilding of the perineum (the space between the vagina and rectum). This procedure was traditionally performed for a fallen or prolapsed rectum, or rectocele — a bulge of rectum intruding on the vagina. Similar intrusions can occur by the small bowel and bladder.

Vaginoplasty is technically straightforward and lasts approximately one hour. It can be done under local, regional or general anaesthetic. The length of hospital stay depends on the extent of surgery required, and ranges from one to four days. Some women are able to return to work in a week, but a six-week recuperation period is more realistic, which normally coincides with the postoperative check-up.

Labiaplasty is the reduction of the labia minora, and may be performed for purely aesthetic reasons, or because the woman experiences discomfort when wearing tight jeans or cycling, for example. The operating time is between 30-60 minutes, and it can be performed under either local or general anaesthetic. A week off work is often advised. Other less popular vaginal procedures include liposuction of the fat overlying the pubic bone, augmentation of the

labia, reconstruction of the hymen, and the hoodectomy, an operation comparable to the male circumcision and not to be confused with ritual female circumcision.

## Side effects

Complications can include those common to any form of surgery, like anaesthetic problems, bleeding and infection. Tight scar tissue formation may be a late complication. An over-tight vaginal entrance can lead to painful intercourse, and there may be extra sensitivity in the area.

There is great controversy as to whether or not vaginal rejuvenation can, beyond altered appearance, improve the pleasure of intercourse or increase sexual desire. However, many couples do report more satisfying lovemaking, increased tightness, and a belief that surgery has helped their sex lives.

## Going under the knife

If you are considering surgery, make sure you do your homework first. Read up on the procedure fully, and check out the website of the British Association of Plastic Reconstructive and Aesthetic Surgeons: [www.bapras.org.uk](http://www.bapras.org.uk). Along with personal recommendations wherever possible, you should always find out about the training, experience and qualifications of your surgeon. Visit: [www.dh.gov.uk/cosmeticsurgery](http://www.dh.gov.uk/cosmeticsurgery) to find out what to look for. During a consultation, you should have everything fully explained to you, and not feel as though you are being put under any pressure. If you are in any doubt, walk out.