

## Tumescent liposuction is a kind, gentle technique

*Controversy over liposuction complications led to state regulations limiting fat removal*

**By Karen Nash**  
Staff Contributor

**Miami Beach** — The kinder, gentler technique permitted by tumescent liposuction, makes the procedure the one of choice for Helena Igra, M.D., dermatologist and cosmetic surgeon in Miami Beach, Fla. The key, however, is performing true tumescent liposuction — not making changes while still trying to label the procedure as “tumescent.”

Dr. Igra, in practice for 13 years, said the controversy over the dangers of liposuction has been unfairly associated with tumescent liposuction in the eyes of the public, and even of some doctors.

“Because of reported casualties related to more traditional liposuction around this country and in South America, people are afraid of liposuction in general,” she said. That’s where dermatologists, as a group,

feel they have a better way.

“As far as we know, there have never been any deaths directly attributable to tumescent liposuction,” Dr. Igra said. “Some physicians who say they perform tumescent liposuction, blur the true definitions. They may use much less anesthetic fluid, leading them to put their patients to sleep, or they may administer intravenous fluids or use different anesthetics in the infiltrate. We stick with lidocaine because of its researched pharmacokinetics and safety profile.”

### Tangible advantages

Dr. Igra noted the advantages provided by tumescent liposuction are tangible:

■ **The patient is awake.** “I.V. sedation or general anesthesia may allow some physicians to do the procedure more quickly,” said Dr. Igra, “and that’s okay for them — but I’m more comfortable with my patients awake. That way, I don’t have to worry

about respiratory depression and other factors.”

■ **Less blood loss.** Because the area to be liposuctioned is tumesced with liters of anesthetic solution containing lidocaine and epinephrine, the blood vessels are constricted. That provides ample room for the canula movement without needing to worry about bleeding.

■ **Less bruising.** Bruising is caused by bleeding, and since minimal bleeding occurs that means bruising is rare.

■ **Less discomfort.** Soreness is the result of the bruises. So, with fewer bruises, there is little to no pain.

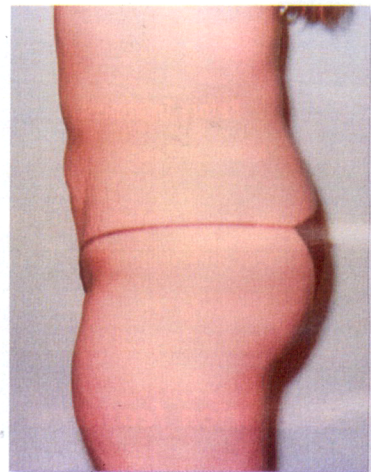
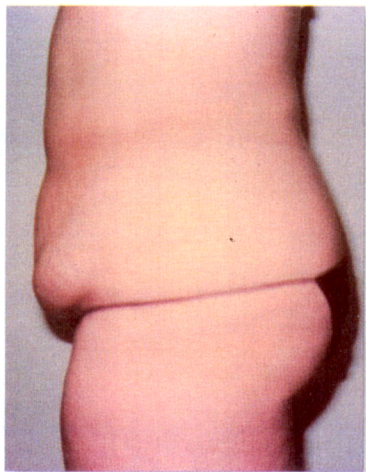
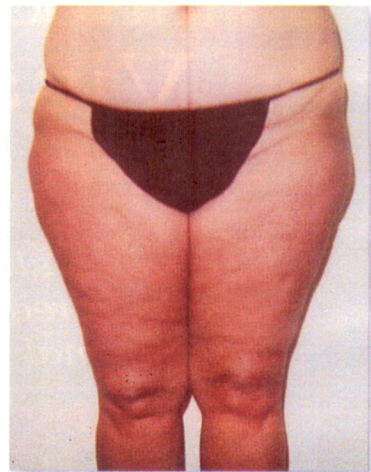
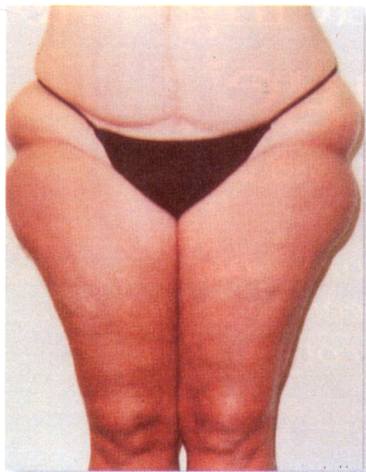
■ **Quicker recovery.** When the body has to metabolize bruising over a large area, that keeps patients home from work for a week or two. After this liposuction technique, they can return to work in a day or two.

### As gentle as can be

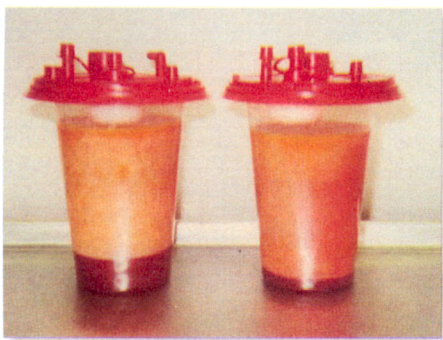
Dr. Igra teaches a very gentle approach to tumescent liposuction; so gentle, in fact, her patients have been known to chat on the phone, read a magazine, or even plan their next visit in the midst of the procedure.

“In my opinion, tumescent liposuction is an elegant procedure. Since my patients are very much awake, I have to slow my hand motions so they don’t feel any discomfort. Because my movements are gentle and my instruments so small (Dr. Igra prefers 10- to 12-gauge cannulas) I can do the surgery without having my patients say, ‘ouch.’ If they are uncomfortable, I thank them for letting me know, and I put in a little more anesthetic.”

“I’ll watch a patient’s toes. If they are wiggling, I figure the patient must be feeling something, even if they aren’t saying anything. I then know I need to change what I’m doing.” According to Dr. Igra, the risk of serious injury is reduced if patients are awake. There are unfortunate



(Top left) A 50-year-old female patient prior to liposuction on hips and lateral thighs. The same patient (top right) is shown nine months following the procedure. (Bottom right) This 22-year-old patient underwent liposuction of the abdomen and is shown post op at four months.



More than 2 L of fat were removed from one patient's thighs and hips. (Photographs courtesy of Helena Igra, M.D.)

reports of perforated organs during liposuction cases. Your patient, if awake, would not let you go through the abdominal wall.

Tumescent liposuction builds in many safeguards.

### Legislative control

Florida is one of the states where controversy over liposuction complications has led to state regulations limiting the amount of fat that can be removed during any liposuction procedure.

Dr. Igra agrees with those limits. “From clinical experience, I would hold to removing just 3L of fat anyway. If I take more than that, I find patients do not bounce back as quickly,” she said.

Dr. Igra continued, “The number of areas to be treated in one session should be limited for safety reasons, and to make sure your patient has the easiest recovery. If the patient is very large, I would intuitively schedule two separate sessions, because you don’t want to shock the body anymore than you need to.”

Dr. Igra limits a case to three, usually contiguous, areas so patients only need to wear one garment while they are recuperating. She also limits her lidocaine concentration to 55 mg/kg, calculated in advance. She said enough factors can affect the metabolism of lidocaine that she prefers to stay below accepted limits, whenever possible.

Dr. Igra knows that her gentle approach to tumescent liposuction is not for everyone.

She explained that some surgeons with “a very aggressive, impatient personality may need to have their patients sedated so they can vigorously do the procedure as quickly as possible.” She prefers to take her time and perform the surgery from start to finish — including doing her own infiltration. She believes the patient still expects to see the doctor do the entire procedure.”

Dr. Igra said, “Then I can go home with a bounce in my step and a smile on my face because my patients hopped off the table. We had to hold them back, they felt so good!” CST