

Hymenoplasty, is a direct outcome of the high value that Indians place on virginity. "There have been cases where the future mother-in-law has taken her daughter-in-law-to-be to a gynaecologist to check if her hymen is intact," says Dixit. The procedure, as the name suggests, restores the hymen, a thin layer of tissue located on the outside of the vagina. According to Dhama, the procedure is also carried out to facilitate healing after sexual abuse or assault. The procedure usually takes a day and can be performed under regional or local anaesthesia. The only downside is that it costs at least ₹25,000, and since the hymen is not going to last forever, this is money well spent only for mental satisfaction.

Some of the other procedures on offer serve a more practical purpose—that of heightened pleasure. The vagina does face its fair amount of stress, right from the aftereffects of childbirth to ageing and trauma that dampen pleasure to an extent. Says Dixit: "This results in discontentment for both the partners during intercourse. Labial flattening, labial enlargement or unevenness can also make the region look unappealing. This may result in discomfort or pain during intimate contact and an inability to wear certain clothes (tight jeans)." He also terms female genital cosmetic surgery a 'facelift' for the vulva and vagina.

The cost of such a facelift to your nether regions would range from ₹50,000 to over a lakh. However, for some it is worth it, especially those who are willing to go the extra mile to please their partners. "A patient, who had been married twice, came to me and said that she was worried her husband would lose interest in her as he did not enjoy sex. I helped her with the tightening of the vagina and as a result she was able to enjoy sex with her partner," says Dhama.

Thomas, too, recalls cases where women have sought vaginal rejuvenation to surprise their partners. "I remember a woman who was going on a cruise with her husband and wanted to get the procedure done as a surprise for him," he says. Vaginoplasty, also referred to as vaginal rejuvenation, vaginal tightening or vaginal reconstruction, is a procedure which improves the appearance and the tone of the vagina by tightening the vaginal muscles, supportive tissues and removing the excessive vaginal linings. Women suffering from stress incontinence (involuntary loss of urine with coughing, sneezing, laughing, exercising, or sex) can also resort to vaginoplasty. Women are also increasingly showing interest in labiaplasty or labial contouring to give their labia a fuller look.

According to Dixit, labial contouring is commonly sought by middle-aged married women who are unhappy with the flattened appearance of the outer lips or the overhanging enlarged inner lips. Unwanted

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fat from the tummy or thighs is transferred to the outer lips to restore their youthful appearance. The enlarged inner lips are refashioned by meticulous wedge excisions. The lax vaginal tract (caused by ageing or following child birth) can be tightened by wedge excision of the lining as well as tightening the surrounding muscles. This procedure increases friction during intercourse and can enhance pleasure.

The pros of labiaplasty include the elimination of pain and discomfort during intercourse, when wearing tight clothing or engaging in physical exercise and activities, says Dhama. It may also increase the chances of a woman reaching orgasm during intercourse. The disadvantage, according to Dhama, is the recovery time it takes to achieve normal sexual function. The healing time is about two or three weeks. Pain and discomfort may be experienced in some cases during initial healing. In some cases, the desired result may not be achieved. Thus, choosing a qualified and experienced cosmetic surgeon is paramount.

These procedures usually do not have many risks, according to doctors. Most of the procedures can be performed as day-care procedures. However, it is vital that the doctor is an expert, as the rectal region is just south of the vaginal region and due caution has to be exercised to avoid damage. ■

