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# Vying for those perfect abs?

New Delhi, July 3 – Ninety thousand rupees will fetch you a brand new six-pack. Ask Dr Mohan Thomas, a senior cosmetic surgeon and consultant at Mumbai's Breach Candy hospital.

Dr Thomas gets 20 to 30 people every month who want six-pack abs the easy way (by a surgery called injection lipolysis - see box). And a lot of men do want them the easy way, because, face it, working to get a six-pack is very hard.

But it's also apparently very desirable to have one. Blame it on luck, blame it on fate. actually, blame it on Shah Rukh Khan, who kicked off the trend less than three years ago with Om Shanti Om. And on Aamir Khan in Ghajini, Shahid Kapur in Kaminey and more recently, Imran Khan in I Hate Luv Storys.

The consensus among the people who do matter is: if you ain't got a six-pack, you ain't fit! Fortunately, that kind of thinking is usually restricted to models and film people. "Sixty per cent of the people who come to me are aspiring models," says Dr Thomas.

"Everyone comes to Mumbai to try their luck in the world of glamour and naturally, they all want to look the best they can. I think people looked at SRK and Aamir and thought 'hey, these two went from being regular guys to being 'ripped,' so why can't I?'"

While the other 40 per cent of Dr Thomas's clientele comprises older men struggling with mid-life crises, it's primarily men in the glamour industry who are obsessed with six-packs.

"It's simple: an aspiring model who does have a six pack certainly has an edge over one who doesn't, even if the other person does have a flat, toned tummy," says Pranav Awasthi, who runs Glitz Model Management, a leading modelling agency.

"That's not to say that models don't require other skills. But at the end of the day, they're expected to be fit and today, the definition of fit includes having a six-pack."

Fashion designer Prasad Bidapa is one of those people who welcome the trend and take it seriously.

"The '50s and the '60s were the years of the prosperity paunch; the '90s were the years of the bulky macho man with huge shoulders. This decade, lean is in," he says.

Bidapa thinks that having a six-pack is a reflection of our changing perception of health and beauty. "I see it like this: sporting a designer bag with a six-pack works. Sporting a designer bag with a flabby body doesn't work. It's that simple," he laughs.

"So every model that comes to audition for me has six-packs - the serious ones have eight - and that's because the competition is so intense."

So is having a six-pack the be all and end all of making it big in the glamour world? "Unfortunately, that's exactly what the newbies feel," says Awasthi.

"But ultimately, acting skills is where the real money is because unless you become a supermodel, you're probably just one of the 10-15 guys walking the ramp.

"Redefining fitness Some filmmakers believe that there's no novelty in actors having six-packs anymore. Shahid Kapur didn't flaunt his abs in *Badmaash Company* even though the film did have the mandatory beach scene. Director Parmeet Sethi claims that this was a conscious decision.

"Shahid Kapur has not shown his physique in my film because both of us came to the conclusion that it looked extremely pretentious, a been-there-done-that kind of a thing, you know. I mean, let's face it - Shahid's character is supposed to be your average kid from the '90s and at that time, abs were certainly not in vogue."

Sethi is point blank when airing his views about the trend. "For some strange reason, the younger generation today feels that having a six-pack somehow means you have arrived! I think actors today are competing in all the wrong areas - you know, abs, hair, dancing skills, rather than things that matter like the kind of films they do and the roles they play."

Having six-packs is not bad, he sums up. "But having only six-packs most certainly is." Punit Malhotra, the director who presents young Imran Khan in a most un-Imran Khan avatar in *I Hate Luv Storys* too claims that he "only wanted the actor to look fit and getting washboard abs wasn't a conscious decision at all.

But of course, by today's definition, 'fit' equals six-pack." It's a trend, not a requirement, says Malhotra, but adds, "I'm not sure if it's a healthy trend." It certainly doesn't seem very healthy. Even gym trainers warn people off it.

"Sometimes, Aamir used to shriek in pain and cry doing the stomach crunches while training for *Ghajini*, but he did not skip a single day," says his trainer Satya. It took Aamir 13 months of

intense four-hour workout sessions daily and a carefully monitored diet regimen to achieve his look in the film.

"I'm not sure how safe that is for normal people to attempt," says Satya. The real meaty issue is the fact that at the end of the day, washboard abs are a modern-day, machine made construct (ever saw yesteryear wrestlers and even bodybuilders flaunting their six-packs?).

The odd part is that most females find them positively gross and claim that a six-pack is certainly not what they're looking for in their guy. But showbiz has its own rules - most of them made by men!

#### *The trend*

2007: Shah Rukh Khan, of all people, kicks off the trend with Farah Khan's Om Shanti Om. The actor's six-pack creates much buzz around the film.

2008: Aamir Khan follows in his footsteps and unveils a pumped up new body and a brand new six-pack for the Hindi remake of the action flick Ghajini.

2010: Imran Khan is the latest entrant on the six-pack scene in the just-released romantic comedy, I Hate Luv Storys.