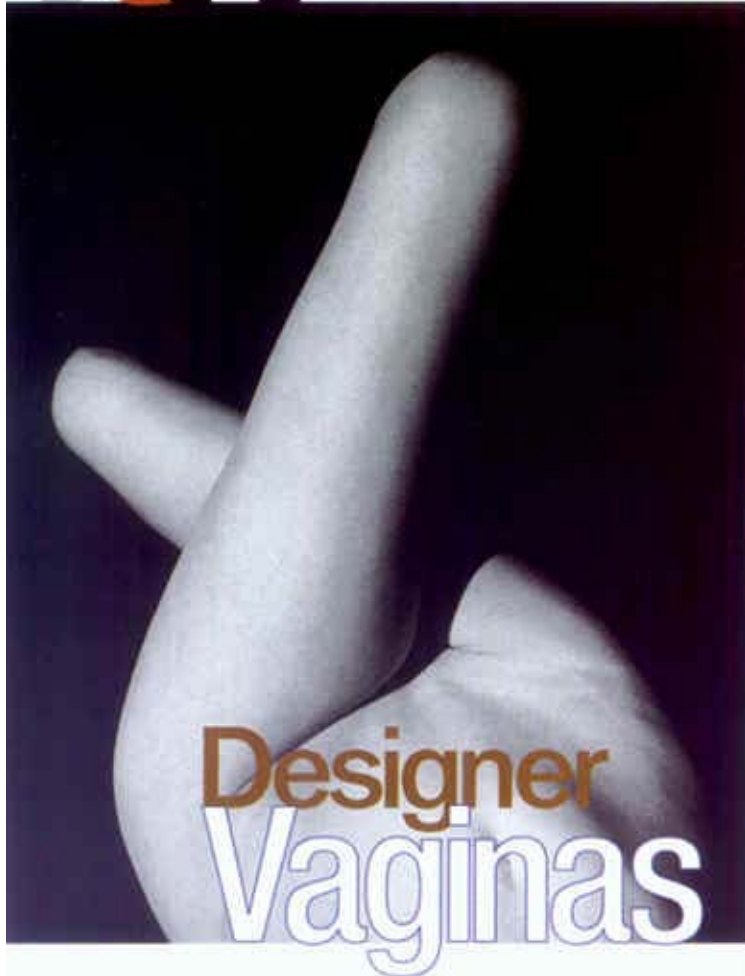


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Face-lifts, liposuction, collagen injections—commonplace procedures all. But vaginal tightening? Susannah Breslin uncovers the latest on this plastic-surgery technique.



Designer Vaginas

The way Dr. David L. Matlock sees it, he's the Picasso of vaginas: But this gynecologist is just one of many doctors practicing the latest cosmetic-surgery technique: female genital reconstruction. From remodeling the appearance of the labia minora and labia majora (the inner and outer vaginal lips, respectively) to reducing the diameter of the vaginal canal—which expands with aging, childbirth or a combination of both—gynecologists and plastic surgeons are altering private parts at the request of women willing to

shell out thousands of dollars for these procedures. At Matlock's office, the Laser Vaginal Rejuvenation Center of Los Angeles, an average of 20 vaginal surgeries are performed a month and as many as 20 calls a day come from women requesting information.

Some plastic surgeons, like Dr. Peter B. Fodor of Los Angeles, perform such surgery only if it is a medical necessity, for sexual dysfunction or hygiene problems. Others, like Matlock and Dr. Jane Norton of Palm Desert, CA, are happy to cater to cosmetic desires. "Whatever needs to be fixed, I fix," says Norton of her patients, who are often embarrassed to be nude in front of their partners. Norton frequently injects the genital area with fat liposuctioned from the inner thigh or abdomen to give it a more youthful look. Laser vaginal "rejuvenation" goes one step further. In this procedure—done to enhance sexual gratification—the vaginal wall muscles are tightened by suturing them together, creating a smaller circumference. According to one surgeon who does the procedure, there's no difference between himself and the doctor who, after completing an episiotomy on a woman, fulfills her husband's request to "throw a stitch in there for me."

The hype of vaginal-muscle tightening is quite possibly nothing more than that. And the theory behind the procedure—that increased vaginal friction will result in a heightened erotic experience for women—is, at the very least, debatable. Dr. Dennis Lynch, former president of the American Society of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgeons, an association that represents 97 percent of board-certified plastic surgeons, says of vaginal-muscle tightening, "That sort of thing doesn't even fit into our list of approved procedures." But Matlock and doctors like him aren't breaking any laws. "A license to practice medicine is a license to do everything," says Dr. Henry M. Spinelli, a New York-based plastic surgeon who reconstructs vaginas in postcancerous women.

Designer vaginas don't come cheap. Matlock, who over the past decade has done about a thousand vaginal surgeries, charges from \$2500 to \$8000 for the procedure, which isn't

covered by insurance. Norton, who over the past 20 years has done some 2000 vaginal surgeries, says, "I don't do anything for less than \$4000." But the cost isn't stopping some women: With demand up by 50 percent since 1997, Matlock is so busy he hasn't even had time to finish putting together the photo album of before and-after pictures. ■

Intimate Advice

Women interested in improving vaginal muscle function (read: having more and better orgasms) should look first at nonsurgical treatments. Options include the Intimate Trainer (888-303-0123), a device that emits low-level electrical waves to contract the vaginal muscles. Just under three inches long, the Trainer is placed in the vagina for an hour or so daily, then removed. Kegel exercises (contracting and releasing the vaginal muscles) can also help, as can FemTone Vaginal Weights (800-422-6811), a five-pack of vaginal "barbells" that range from 20 to 70 grams apiece.

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