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Interview with Dr Barry Lycka & Dr Michelle Copeland

Dr Barry Lycka cosmetic dermatologist from Edmonton, Alberta is talking today with

Dr Michelle Copeland, Harvard-trained plastic surgeon from central New York

Talking in detail about how to get rid of fat ankles & calves using ankle liposuction.

Over and over, people, and its mostly women, are bothered by their fat ankles and calves. It is frequently thought that there is nothing that can be done to help so people continue to live with their problem. BUT there is no need to suffer any longer, as today we talk to Dr Michelle Copeland. She is a world expert in getting rid of fat ankles & calves and patients from all over the world visit her to get help with this problem.

How long have you been working with fat ankles & calves, Dr Copeland?

Well liposuction has really refined and because of that we have been able to expand the techniques into other areas – such as the ankles and calves. We use small incisions to remove the fat cells and when fat cells are removed – they are gone forever! Originally as you know, liposuction was for treating people with an abnormal distribution of fat in larger areas such as 'saddle bags', abdomen, and is very effective in giving people the shape they want. Therefore over time as the instruments have got finer, and we are also now using a laser light as well, then we can do liposculpture, and this is when we have been able to address the problems of fat ankles and calves.

Shapely ankles and calves, especially when wearing high heels, is a very attractive look, but there are many legs and ankles out there which don't look attractive because they have fatty deposits around the ankles.

What advances have been made which has made tackling this area easier & better?

The problem is also known as a 'cankle' and is where the ankle blends into the shape of the calf. There are many components that make an ankle and calf lack definition:

- bone structure
- muscle structure
- and the 3rd is the fat

There are people who have a distribution of fatty deposits along the ankle and extending into the calf and regardless of whether they exercise or lose weight, they can't get rid of it.

This is when liposculpture comes in as we are able to remove the fat and give someone a shapely ankle and calf.

We know people think... is that all people have to worry about... fat ankles & calves? But actually people don't wear skirts or shorts in summer because of it and in winter they have problems getting boots to fit since their legs are so large. Boots are not only very fashionable but functional in winter weather. But help is available these days.

Are there many doctors working on ankles & calves?

Not really. Dr Copeland sees patients from all over the world and she has developed specific techniques that work very well. It is done as an outpatient. It is not a long procedure but unlike liposuction in other areas there are some specific items that we have to be very careful of. Swelling is the number one concern. We also need to check that patients don't have issues such as varicose veins, and that they are not taking birth control pills, to ensure that there are no problems with the procedure.

It is important to know these 'contra-indications'. If someone has varicose veins it is better to get them treated first. But the primary concern is that whenever we are operating on the legs, that we are aware of the risk of developing blood clots in the legs. This is always a concern even when operating on other parts of the body, but we do everything to minimize the risks.

Who is the best candidate for this procedure Dr Copeland?

Someone who is in good health, and has fatty deposits around their ankles. Not just big bone structures or big muscles – and that we can determine by clinical examination.

Is it always due to fat or are there other problems causing large ankles?

It can be anatomic but if someone is just overweight then they can typically lose or gain weight and it is not always noticeable in the ankles – it doesn't tend to change - it's a fixed area of fat. And even some fit healthy people have problems with fatty ankles also.

If someone doesn't have this problem then they might be thinking it's no big deal but for those people who suffer from it - it is very inhibiting. They want the freedom and confidence to wear skirts, shorts, high heels, boots. Dr Lycka shared the story of a patient of his who was passionate about skiing but who had a problem with ski boots being too tight and causing skin problems and infections. She put up with the pain and problems for a long time before having ankle liposuction done and she was so very happy at being able to ski without problems from her ski boots and no pain!

Are some people just vain?

Well some are but the majority of the people who Dr Copeland sees are not. At their consultation she speaks to them about the problems, examines them, takes photos and computer imaging, makes sure they have realistic expectations and that the issues and problems they report are real and they are not just fussing over nothing!

Most people who go to her do have issues in accumulation of fat in their ankle and calf area that can be unattractive and limiting to their activities.

Dr Lycka considers that this is one of the most difficult areas of the body to do as it is very unforgiving if there are mistakes, if too much fat is removed then there can be real problems. As Dr Copeland added, this is why they use very fine instruments to liposculpt. People have different skin resiliency which affects the final results. It is a procedure that is very much a blend of art and science – the science of the procedure and the instruments, combined with the art of using them to get the results the patients want.

Do you find the laser really helpful for this procedure?

Yes – the fine beam of light helps to liquify the fat, it is more precise than using cannulas. We are performing very fine liposculpture.

We make very small incisions which are nice, placed and hidden in the ankle and below the back of the knee. This is very well tolerated by patients BUT they have to wear support hose. The swelling can last, even though patients are up and about almost immediately, movement and exercise is important. Patients will have to wear support hose for weeks really especially if sitting or standing for long periods for work.

What are the instructions for patients in the immediate post operative period?

As soon as Dr Copeland finishes the first leg, the post operative care begins – she elevates the leg and uses ice to prevent swelling, then its into a compression garment. There are very clear instructions about elevating legs – its critical in the first 24 – 48 hours. The less swelling there is at the beginning, the faster the recovery will be.

Walking is also very important in the post operative period to prevent problems with Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT) so there is no bed rest! DVT is the biggest concern with performing this procedure. Therefore if a patient is taking birth control pills, it increases the risk of DVT and so they have to stop taking them for a few weeks before the surgery.

And what about smokers?

Well they are also at risk of DVT therefore at Dr Copeland's practice – if they want to be treated they must also stop smoking. Healing is also slowed down in people who smoke. In most cases where wounds fail to heal or there are similar complications – it is almost always a smoker! Smokers must accept that they have bigger risks because they smoke.

How many cases of ankle liposuction do you do a year, Dr Copeland?

Well over the years more people have realized that treatment is possible for their fatty ankles so more and more patients are now going to Dr Copeland for treatment. It is mostly a woman's issue. It also used to be fairly seasonal with people thinking about doing this for summer, but with the popularity of boots, then there is year round demand for it.

The procedure takes about an hour under local anesthetic, and there is the recovery period but because the stockings are underneath the clothes then people can get back to work very quickly – unless they do hard physical labor but even then after a week or so they will be back to that as well. They must take precautions to minimize recurrent swelling. There can also be some numbness and must be careful if they shave their legs (this can last for months).

Ankle Liposuction In Summary...

It has a high degree of patient satisfaction, more people are getting it done, especially women.

The attention to the details makes all the difference in making the procedure successful and that includes before surgery, in the consultation and patients expectations, during surgery, paying close attention to the area being sculpted and after surgery really paying close attention to what to do afterward to minimize swelling, minimize DVT, and speed recovery.

All of these aspects make a difference when it comes to the final results.

It is very important that patients educated themselves about the procedure, and see a doctor experienced in doing this. They must have realistic expectations, understand the recovery issues. They must do their due diligence when choosing a surgeon because not everyone is skilled in this procedure, it is unrealistic to expect every surgeon to be skilled in every procedure – that's why surgeons specialize! Every doctor has areas they love to treat and areas that they don't love to treat so much!

Finally patients must be sure that they fully understand the risks and benefits of the procedure. If they decide its worth it for them, then they should embrace it because it really will make a wonderful difference to their lives – both Dr Lycka and Dr Copeland see this with patients every day.

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Dr Copeland also has some videos on YouTube of her performing ankle liposuction

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