№ 22
DECEMBER 6, 2024

BEAUTY AND WELLNESS

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For a body so sculpted, it almost looks fake.

KNIVES OUT!

Extreme Body Makeovers

Dr. Ryan Neinstein's kneecap-to-neck approach to surgery nearly bisects the waist and requires a four-week recovery. Yet people are scrambling for a slot on his schedule



BY BRENNAN KILBANE

DECEMBER 27, 2024
READING TIME: 7 MINUTES

When Dr. Ryan Neinstein calls me, he's in the process of receiving a haircut. It is the busiest time of his year. Neinstein is a body sculptor who does arms, waists, ankles, "the nooks and crannies," he has said, and the bodies he sculpts need weeks to heal before they can be bared upon yachts and beaches come May. 'Tis the season to recover. "You know, Memorial Day is right around the corner for East Coasters, right?" he says.

The plastic surgeon is renowned for his liposuction, but even more renowned for his Mommy Makeovers, a term for procedures used to reshape the postpartum figure. He does 800 mommies a year, with 12 scheduled for this week.

Lately, Neinstein has become most celebrated for his Birkin Body, a $75,000 neck-to-kneecap renovation that comes with a hotel stay. The term was coined by Oli Coleman, the *New York Post* editor who blew up the doctor's business. "I woke up one morning and just saw there was an article about me, and whenever you wake up and there's a *Post* article about you, your sphincter kind of clenches," Neinstein says. But he came around to it.

If the term Birkin Body could be confusing—are we talking about the right Jane?—it isn't in Neinstein's contexts, which are mostly female (though his patients are 30 percent male) and highly affluent, a cohort for whom a "push present" is a ritual custom, and for whom a Birkin is a bag, not a British woman.

The largest marketing channel for Neinstein is his Instagram, where he has a modest following of 79,000 and posts alternatingly about work and his personal life, which is basically his work too. Before dawn breaks he'll begin his daily round of house calls, some of which are storied: In one video he kneels beside a recovering patient, who is hunched over in discomfort, her face redacted by an emoji. Her compression garments are layered over fluffy white bandages in front of a sparkling Christmas tree. "It's just me and my phone," he told me, "showing everyone what we're doing."

The American Society of Plastic Surgeons' definition of the Mommy Makeover is not terribly specific and basically includes any number of operations conducted with the vague aim of "restoration." They often, however, begin with liposuction. Neinstein describes his as "extensive." The Birkin Body package adds an abdominoplasty, or tummy tuck, a breast lift and perhaps (dainty, sporty) implants, and a week-plus stay at the Plaza hotel.

“We use little implants—they call it the European model, a youthful, perky breast,” Neinstein says, noting that big breasts aren’t popular in his practice because they don’t often fit into couture clothing.

He explained that part of the procedure’s premium cost comes from “the large, experienced team that goes into doing this operation. It’s not, like, me, one nurse, and an anesthesiologist.” And it’s all hands on deck: halfway through, the patient has to be flipped over. Neinstein often works alongside Dr. Anna Steve, a plastic surgeon who specializes in small-volume implants and commonly features in reviews; “Dr. Neinstein and Dr. Anna gave me ‘my body but better’ back!” raves one RealSelf user. (On the plastic-surgery-review site, Neinstein’s 4.9-star rating approaches unanimous praise.)

Neinstein, for his part, takes care to carve out the waist, the critical factor in his endeavored hourglass. In typical tummy tucks, a scalpel incision extends between six and eight inches in length horizontally beneath the belly button. But to snatch the waist tighter, Neinstein cuts an additional six to eight inches on either side, drawing lines that curve around the abdomen toward the small of the back.

Patients don’t mind a longer scar, “because it dramatically improves the waist,” Neinstein says. “Without removing the skin of the waist, like we do, you can’t get that really eye-popping result.”

“He is meticulous,” wrote a former patient on Reddit, who received a 360-degree lower-body lift. Her abdomen was sliced almost all the way around, her skin pulled taut as if being tucked into tight jeans. The recovery for the procedures can be agonizing, and some patients are unable to stand up straight for weeks.

Another patient said the recovery felt like completing the hardest abdominal workout you have ever done and then being stabbed with 10 knives. “I have a high pain tolerance,” wrote a third patient. “It is a very strange sensation to be numb under your entire midsection, yet to still feel pain, not just pressure.” Her post-operative lymphatic-drainage massages began uncomfortably and ended with a nurse using a syringe to extract a puddle of serous fluid from a back incision.

But Neinstein told the patient that after between three and four weeks, she’d experience a turning point in her recovery; at six weeks, she would feel a little numbness that would be dwarfed by her affection for her “new midsection.” Neinstein likes to give a four-week recovery window for Birkin Bodies—though one of his patients, a 77-year-old, took a month and a half.

The duration of the surgery is also extreme. While Mommy Makeovers such as the Birkin Body can vary depending on the surgeon's technique, the American Society of Plastic Surgeons recommends "no more than 6 hours duration for operations at an ambulatory surgery center," though this guideline could be shorter depending on the state, explains Dr. Heather Faulkner, the patient-safety chair at A.S.P.S. Neinstein's team says six hours is all he needs. (Neinstein, through the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada, is an A.S.P.S. member surgeon.)

"He's a wizard," his publicist says admiringly, unsurprisingly.

During their convalescence, Birkin Body recipients tend to stay at the Plaza, as included in their package. One patient, a real-estate agent in California, gave a room tour on her Instagram Stories, showing off an immaculate, gold-laced bathroom filled with stacked towels: "Home for the next 2 weeks." Neinstein's staff delivers fresh flowers to the room, and then the doctor makes house calls to recovering patients every day, with a few more scheduled after his evening haircut.

Neinstein's surgical center is located steps away from the Plaza, in the building that houses Bergdorf Goodman—another luxurious association he is keen to emphasize—and the office's décor features Calcutta marble, deer hide, wainscoting, and Guccissimo pill bottles. A clinical office around the corner—where doctors do consultations, follow-ups, and the odd injection—is more restrained but retains signature touches, like cocktail napkins printed with Neinstein's tagline: LOOK GOOD, FEEL GOOD.

The doctor was born in Toronto, the grandchild of Holocaust survivors, and completed his surgical schooling and certification in Canada before coming to New York to study sub-specialties in body contouring. Then he fell in love. "I met a girl, and I subsequently married another girl, as the story goes," he told the *Blonde Files* podcast in 2022.

But what he really fell in love with was the American Dream. "Anyone says it's the greatest country in the world," he said, "and it's still true." By the end of 2014, he had started a private practice in New York, seeing patients out of a dentist's office.

Neinstein and his wife, the fitness instructor Lauren Ashley Neinstein, are a one-two punch to the gut. They are perfect body doubles, sculptors of the same medium using vastly different tools. The doctor's family life is featured on his Instagram, interspersed with countless videos of women's midsections being circumferentially tightened. His two kids love Pokémon cards. Neinstein adores his family but has acknowledged the irony of the situation his ambition has created, in which he must devote a Sisyphean amount of daily effort and energy to affirming the bodies of women who are not his wife.

"I want to not just be the best plastic surgeon, with the best body contouring possible, but I also want to be the best employer, and at the same time be the best husband," he told *The Blonde Files*. "These things don't necessarily go together."

On Instagram, the Neinsteins predictably attract their fair share of snark from Internet communities that delight in dressing down influencers. But just as often, it's easy to encounter testimony from somebody who has undergone her workout classes or his body contouring and feels compelled to defend them—Neinstans, if you will.

Competing surgeons have also sung his praises (off the record). The most salient critiques of the doctor that can be found concern an overzealous work ethic—in 2022, a former employee brought a suit against Neinstein alleging he forced her to work through her coronavirus illness in 2020, and the parties settled out of court—and his egomania, which, in my experience interviewing plastic surgeons, is pretty much par for the course.

But Neinstein's patients don't love him like a good friend; they love him like nuns love Jesus. The first time I heard his name, it was from my editor assigning me this story. The second, it was at a birthday party in North Carolina, when my fumbling explanation of the Mommy Makeover caused two heads to spontaneously whip toward me: "Are you writing about Dr. Neinstein?"

One of those people, pregnant with her second, dreamed about receiving his services after seeing them on Instagram; the other had a friend who had received his services. ("I'm a huge fan of his!" the friend told me, but she declined to chat about her experience.)

"I really wanted to solve people's problems. I think that's what all surgeons do," Neinstein told me. "So I found [that] the biggest problem in plastic surgery that people could not fix with diet or exercise was the changes from babies, menopause, and weight loss. I thought, 'O.K., I'm going to go all in, because I want to solve this problem. I want to solve it better than anyone solved it before.'"

Now the doctor is training other surgeons on his tummy technique so he can offer eye-popping results to more patients for an even lower cost. Not only has he embraced the Birkin Body term, but he's begun to think of his work as its own kind of luxury product—one that he hopes could become recognizable from across a pool, not by the length of their scars but the quality of their contours, like a sumptuous leather handbag with palladium hardware.

"I want people to see [my patients] and be like, 'How does this mother of four look so good?'" he said. "And it wraps in with Birkin Body because, you know, it's a luxury item. They're hard to get, because there's only one of me, and I can only do so many."

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