



Restoring function

ADELAIDE GYNAECOLOGIST AND PELVIC RECONSTRUCTIVE SURGEON **DR OSEKA ONUMA** EXPLAINS WHY VAGINAL SURGERY SHOULD ALWAYS BE CONSIDERED A FUNCTIONAL PROCEDURE. LIZZY WOOD REPORTS.

No matter what drives a woman to seek vaginal surgery, Adelaide gynaecologist and pelvic reconstructive surgeon Dr Oseka Onuma believes the procedure is always functional, and never merely cosmetic.

'Even a procedure to reduce the size of the labia minora is first and foremost designed to alleviate any discomfort or irritability caused by the complaint,' he says. 'It's very unusual for a patient to present without some level of discomfort and it's usually a combination of this distress coupled with cosmetic concerns that eventually drives them to seek help.'

Thanks to a combination of the natural toll taken by ageing and the stresses placed on the reproductive organs during pregnancy and childbirth, women are prone to a number of common complaints.

'Women often come to me complaining of a feeling of pressure or heaviness; they might have low back ache when they stand for long periods of time; or they might be suffering from reduced or no sensation when they have sex,' says Dr Onuma. Other common complaints include women suffering increased vaginal secretions or painful intercourse caused by movement of the uterus.

The good news is a number of relatively unobtrusive surgical procedures exist that can alleviate many of these concerns. And, according to Dr Onuma, more and more women are opting to address these common

complaints not for their partner or anyone else's benefit, but for their own.

'In my experience, women are quite certain about the fact they are seeking help for their own sake. Not that of a partner. They want to regain their confidence and feel healthy again,' he says.

During surgery, Dr Onuma adopts either a laser or non-laser technique, rather than using a scalpel or scissors to make any incisions. 'Using a laser on the vaginal tissues improves healing and reduces any discomfort post-procedure,' he explains.

Dr Onuma also believes it is imperative any vaginal surgery is performed under general anaesthetic. 'One of the risks involved with labiaplasty, for example, is causing damage to the clitoris,' he explains. 'If a surgeon uses local anaesthetic, the clitoris is less well-defined, and the patient is also prone to moving – for example if they sneeze.' Under general anaesthetic, these risks can be avoided.

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Although Dr Onuma says women are much better informed as to their options today than they were even five years ago, it's still important to educate the patient during the consultation.

'Five or more years ago, women might have been to see their GP with the same complaint, only to be told it's something they need to live with – a natural consequence of ageing or child birth,' he says. 'Today, that message has changed and women are increasingly aware of their options.'

However, Dr Onuma believes it's still important to educate the patient during a thorough consultation.

'With the internet, there is much more information available to patients, but unless you know how to decipher that information it can leave you confused,' he says. 'Women need guidance – they need to understand the pros and cons of different procedures and it's the surgeon's job to provide them with robust, reliable information.'

Key to a successful outcome is understanding what each patient's concern is – something that Dr Onuma says not everyone will volunteer of their own accord. 'I often prompt women to reveal what the real problem or concern is, as not everyone is comfortable expressing the underlying issue,' he says. 'Once I understand their key concerns, I can walk side by side with them in order to resolve their concerns.' **csbm**

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