

Super-sizing the assets



Lisa Meadow shows off her newly augmented breasts.

PHOTO: SIMON BAKER

LISA MEADOWS was watching her son play sport when she got chatting to another mum who'd recently had breast implants.

"She was so pleased and happy with them," she remembers.

After decades of padded bras, baggy tops and herbal pills promising bust-boosting powers, it was all the nudge the 39-year-old Christchurch ambulance officer and mother-of-two needed.

She contacted the other woman's plastic surgeon, Howard Klein, and weeks later went from "not even filling an A cup to a 12C-D".

"I'm much happier," she says a year on. "I wasn't an unhappy person, they just make me feel better. I feel that my body's more in proportion. And it encourages me to keep my weight down. I guess it's like an obese person losing weight."

She's had only positive reactions, including from her husband, but only now feels comfortable showing off her new cleavage.

Meadows is a sign of the times. As plastic surgery sheds its stigma, rugby-mums from the suburbs are driving a boom in extreme makeovers.

Auckland plastic surgeon John de Waal says the "big five" surgical procedures for women are liposuction, nose jobs, breast augmentation, eye-

lid surgery and tummy tucks. "Breast augmentation has always been big; but tummy tucks are seeing the biggest increase."

De Waal's noted a trend for women in their 40s and 50s to have tummy tucks to tidy up scar tissue from past, more invasive operations.

He estimates between 400 and 800 of the "big five" are now performed each year by New Zealand's 20 plastic surgeons who specialise in cosmetic work and by an unknown number by other practitioners.

Tristan de Chalain, president of the New Zealand Foundation for Cosmetic Plastic Surgery, estimates that the market is growing by about 10-15% a year.

The Kiwi plastic surgery boom follows international trends. In the United Kingdom last year, cosmetic procedures were up 31% on 2005, after rocketing by 50% between 2000 and 2005. Liposuction was the biggest

climber, followed by eyelid surgery and tummy tucks.

Howard Klein does about 60 breast augmentations a year – 50% more than three years ago.

"Your average plastic surgery patient is still a woman in her 30s who's had kids and is in a stable relationship, who simply wants to look like she did before she had kids — or a little bit better.

"A lot of women like the Pamela Anderson look, higher and rounder."

These days, women are more prepared to be up front about breast surgery. Socialite Nicky Watson not only admitted to three breast augmentation operations but flashed the famous pair during a nipple-piercing scene on a 20/20 documentary.

Klein argues the desire to look attractive is instinctive, and we shouldn't feel conflicted about it. Certainly, there's evidence that attractiveness gives an edge in most areas of life.

And most women will insist they're doing it for themselves.

