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from the elbow down to the armpit before cutting away any loose skin and tissue.

It's not for the faint-hearted, but that hasn't stopped the procedure soaring in popularity.

Research by private healthcare search engine WhatClinic.com has revealed a 69 per cent increase in women having brachioplasty in the past 12 months.

The number of clinics offering the procedure in the UK has also risen by 25 per cent in the last year alone.

Although the British Aesthetic Plastic Surgeon doesn't keep official figures, its U.S. counterpart, the Society of Plastic Surgeons, has revealed a 447 per cent increase in brachioplasty procedures when just 300 women had the procedure compared to 15,900 in 2008.

Perhaps it's no surprise that the number of women who have had the procedure has increased in recent years. It's a procedure that has become the show-off body part of choice for many women.

Think Jennifer Aniston, Cameron Diaz and especially Obama, who has been given the credit for sculpted arms displayed in sleeveless dresses. Paula admits that high heels and tight clothing such as these have led her towards surgery. 'I'm a magazine addict and always lingering over photos of Michelle Obama, she says.

It wasn't about wanting to look like her. I just thought it would allow me to more revealing, fast elegant clothes.

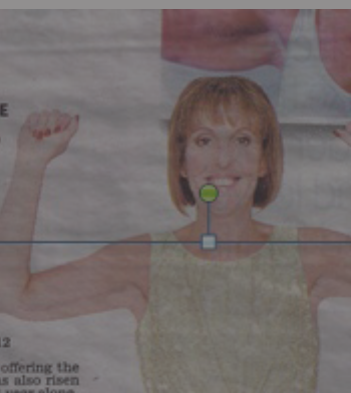
According to Harley surgeon Angelica Kim, just celebrity arms fit in brachioplasty procedure. 'We're in the throes of an epidemic,' she says. 'We are more and more people amounts of weight or surgery or their own desire to look like her. I just thought it would allow me to more revealing, fast elegant clothes.'

Typically, this leaves a lot of loose skin, particularly on the thighs, abdomen and buttocks. 'I'd say around 30 per cent of patients have the procedure for this reason. The rest tend to be women in their 50s who want their arms to be trim figures. They've lost weight, but because they've developed naturally lost elasticity, they've developed a lovely pair of arms,' she says.

For Paula, going under the knife was a no-brainer. 'I considered surgery but I wasn't sure if I had a high pain threshold. Not only was there a £4,500, but I'd need a lot of work to recover, but the final trigger was when I was really going into summer. The swing of the excess skin on my arms was so uncomfortable that it was starting to put me off exercising. And after all those hours working so hard in the gym, I didn't want to let things slide.'

She had an initial talk with consultant plastic surgeon Paul Banwell in May 2012. He has seen a 30 per cent increase in brachioplasty patients at his East Grinstead clinic since 2010. 'The rise is certainly being driven by an increase in bariatric surgery and extreme weight loss, but also a growing awareness that surgery exists to tackle this problem in the first place,' explains Banwell.

'The skin around that area of the arm is naturally very thin, so once it's been stretched through weight gain or loses its elasticity through age, no amount of toning exercises will tighten it up again. It makes no difference whether you lose a lot of weight quickly or over a longer period of time — once the skin



Clare Calcott-James is another delighted customer. She went under the knife after losing 8st in 2007, which left her with folds of skin on her arms that she describes as 'resembling Venetian blinds'.

'They looked like my mother's arms and she's 90,' says Clare, 51, a data and performance manager for the NHS. She lives in Hastings with partner Greg Solomon, 49, who works in banking in the City, and they have six children between them.

'I spent five months on a meal replacement diet and went from 20st 4lbs to 12st and from a dress size 24 to a 12 — the slimmest I've ever been,' she says. But although I looked great when I was dressed, I was left with oceans of embarrassing excess skin. I always had to cover my arms with long sleeves.' She decided brachioplasty was the only answer.

'The one thing that made me hesitate was the £4,500 price. At the time I was single and I was very conscious that I was using up much of my savings.'

Clare tasked surgeon Mark Pickford at McIndoe Surgical Centre, East Grinstead, with transforming her arms. In December 2007 he removed an eyewatering 5kg of excess skin. Clare is delighted with the results. 'There's something so feminine about a lovely pair of arms,' she says.

'Now I regularly show mine off. I sing in an operatic society and now I'm very happy to wear glamorous, arm-bearing outfits. Even under the stage lighting nobody can spot the scars.'

Even though I only did three like making a cup of tea and putting a few clothes away, it was enough to make both arms swell up.

It became rather uncomfortable, and led to me being re-admitted to the clinic for one night, where my arms were elevated to help the swelling go down. After that I was very careful. It was eight weeks before I could start exercising properly again, but the transformation is sensational — I've got shape and muscle definition in my arms that I never knew existed.

The only sign of Paula's 'wings' are scars running from elbow to armpit, although daily use of skin healing oil means they're already fading. But she says they're a small price to pay.

It's a sentiment shared by Katy Southwell, 46, who had brachioplasty in 2008 after deciding her arms were badly aging her.

'I'd always been a swimmer, which is

great for keeping arms taut, but I've yo-yo-dieted between a size 12 and 14 for years,' says Katy, a housewife, who lives in Woodford Green, Essex, with husband Brian. 'I work in traffic management, and their children James, 14, and Jordan, 15.

'Once I hit 40, my arms suddenly seemed to sag and wrinkle like an old lady's. 'Bingo' wings can be as much as a gateway to age as a lined décolletage or hands. I felt my upper arms were seriously letting the side down.

'A friend bought me a beautiful Tiffany bracelet, but I never wore it because watches or jewellery drew attention to my arms.

'And I remember looking at photos taken at Dean's 40th birthday. I'd thought I looked quite good in a gorgeous strappy top, only to be horrified at how bad my arms looked in the pictures.'

Katy consulted plastic surgeon Angela Kanouk to find out if there was anything that could be done. In January 2008, she had the operation.

The £3,000 price tag was paid by her father, a retired policeman who, she says, simply wanted her to feel good about herself.

'The scars are on the underside of my arms and even if I raise them in the air you'd have to look closely to see them,' she says.

'Five years on, I'm still thrilled with the results and I've not had to do anything extra since the surgery to keep them looking good. I've not gained a bit of weight, as I have done recently, my arms never get flabby.'

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Still, Paul Banwell says it's essential that anyone tempted by brachioplasty gives serious consideration to the side effects of surgery before going ahead.

'This is a very invasive operation with significant long-term scarring and initial wounds that can take time to heal because the skin is so delicate in that area,' he says.

'There's no doubt that it can yield terrific results but it's not a procedure that anyone should rush into.

'The question I always ask patients is, which would you rather: live with so-called 'bingo wings' or have slender arms that will always bear scars?'

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