

Chapter 1

Entering the Golden Age of Cosmetic Surgery

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Like any golden age, cosmetic surgery's golden age is flourishing and creating happiness among its devotees. The combination of science, society, and psychology has created this renaissance. New techniques, improved materials, and better training have catapulted cosmetic surgery (once reserved for the famous, the brave, and the rich) into the mainstream.

Cosmetic surgery is now safer, easier, and more affordable than ever before. Out of the closet, it has taken center stage in the self-improvement world and is being embraced by millions every year. Some patients are choosing facial surgery — eyelifts, facelifts, nose reshaping, and chin implants. Other patients are changing the contours of their bodies with liposuction, breast surgery, tummy tucks, and other even arm and thigh lifts.

Cosmetic surgery is real surgery, so you need to be an informed consumer. We cover the subject from A to Z. You can benefit greatly from approaching your decision as a serious one and taking the time to fully use the tools presented in this book.

Putting the “Plastic” in Surgery

You’ve heard the terms *plastic surgery*, *cosmetic surgery*, and *reconstructive surgery* bandied about, and you’re confused. No wonder. You’ll see both medical and marketing uses of these terms and when you see them, you need to know what they mean.

When you hear the word *plastic*, you probably think of the modern material that’s molded into myriad products — patio chairs, kids’ toys, kitchen glasses, and airline knives and forks. The list goes on and on. This plastic isn’t what we’re talking about. Actually, the word comes from the Greek word “plastikos” or the later Latin word “plasticus,” both of which mean “to shape or mold.” Plastic surgeons shape or mold your body into new and more pleasing forms.

Another form of this word, the suffix *-plasty*, is used in the names of many plastic surgery procedures. In the mid-1800s, the medical term for nose reshaping came to be *rhinoplasty* — *rhino* (for nose) plus *plasty* (to describe the shaping technique). Other examples include *abdominoplasty* (reshaping of your abdomen), *mammoplasty* (changing the shape of your breasts), and *blepharoplasty* (reshaping of your eyelids).

As defined by the American Medical Association, the medical specialty of plastic surgery includes two subcategories of procedures:

- ✓ **Cosmetic:** Cosmetic surgery is performed to reshape *normal* structures of the body to improve the patient’s appearance and self-esteem.
- ✓ **Reconstructive:** Reconstructive surgery is performed on *abnormal* features of the body (usually caused by congenital defects, developmental abnormalities, infection, tumors, or disease). It is generally done to improve function, but may also be done to approximate a normal appearance.



Cosmetic surgery improves form, whereas reconstructive surgery improves function.

Defining cosmetic surgery

The primary purpose of cosmetic surgery is to improve your form, or appearance. In cosmetic surgery (sometimes called *aesthetic surgery*), you take a normal or near-normal part of the body and alter it to make it look better. For example, a young man with a weak chin line seeks cosmetic surgery to alter his profile. Or a 60-year-old woman with a face that is normal for a 60-year-old decides to get a facelift to improve her appearance.

The most common cosmetic surgery procedures are the following:

- ✓ Liposuction
- ✓ Breast surgery
- ✓ Nose reshaping
- ✓ Eyelid lift
- ✓ Tummy tuck
- ✓ Facelift

The rate at which these procedures are performed has been growing exponentially for many years. From 1997 to 2003, the number of surgical and non-surgical cosmetic procedures grew from 2.1 million to 8.3 million, according to the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery. If this keeps up, you won't have a neighbor or coworker who hasn't has something lifted, tightened, augmented, or filled.



Cosmetic surgery and cosmetic surgeons are not synonymous. If you or a loved one is considering a cosmetic surgery procedure, you really need to know whether the surgeon you're consulting is trained in plastic surgery. Some doctors, even good ones in other fields, hoping to blur the boundaries of training and experience, run ads calling themselves cosmetic surgeons. This is perfectly legal in many places. They may be wonderful physicians, dermatologists or OB-GYNs, for example, but they never had specialized training in plastic surgery, never did a residency, and so are not as qualified to give you the best result. (Chapter 3 tells you more about this topic.)



Ask, ask, and then ask again to verify that the person who will do the surgery you want is trained in the specialty of plastic surgery or a surgical specialty that includes training in the procedure you want.

Understanding reconstructive surgery

During reconstructive surgery, the surgeon works with a body part that is not within a range of normal appearance to make it look more normal. Generally disease, deformity, or trauma prompts patients to seek reconstructive surgery. The repair of a cleft lip or reconstruction of breasts after cancer is considered reconstructive surgery, not cosmetic surgery, because the body part that is being improved didn't start out in a range of normal appearance; rather, it's being brought back to a normal appearance or function.

Other common reconstructive procedures include facial reconstruction after serious accidents and hand surgery for work-related injuries or degenerative diseases such as arthritis.

Blending cosmetic and reconstructive techniques

Sometimes the cosmetic and reconstructive techniques are combined in one procedure that improves both appearance and function. An example is a rhino/septoplasty, in which the rhino portion of the surgery shapes the outer nose and the septo portion improves the breathing function of the inner nose.

Looking Into Cultural Ideals about Looks

Cosmetic surgery deals primarily with the “ideal” appearance, which is shaped by the culture and the time in which you live. Right or wrong, our modern culture places enormous emphasis on youth and appearance. People who don’t embody the ideals often feel inferior or left out. Children who don’t fit within the norms are often teased and sometimes shunned.

Many people think this view is shallow, that it ought to be different — that the prevailing cultural emphasis on youth and appearance is wrong. They may be right. But it’s almost impossible to be part of a society and not be affected by the expectations and views of the people around you. Your views of beauty are defined, reinforced, or challenged by the world around you.

For centuries, people have been working to change the way they look to meet cultural ideals of beauty. They’ve used cosmetics, costumes, and accessories and even changed the shape of their bodies. Chinese mothers bound their daughters’ feet from birth to keep them tiny. People across the ages and across cultures created all kinds of techniques and used many types of materials to improve their appearance.

Plastic surgeons didn’t invent the concept of enhancing personal beauty; they just took it to another level. The modern version is that advances in medicine, including the discovery of antibiotics, now make cosmetic surgery solutions a safe option for the general public.

Tapping Into Cosmetic Surgery's Popularity

You may wonder how surgery, once thought of as risky, at best, and dangerous, at worst, attracts millions of people. Cosmetic surgery is pervasive in the media and becoming more so in daily conversation and daily life. You can't escape the news surrounding this topic, especially in the Information Age. You may occasionally retreat from the world, but unless you've chosen to live as a recluse, hidden in a cave, you'll be exposed to cosmetic surgery — and often.

It's not only Las Vegas showgirls, actors, and entertainers who seek help when they want to change their appearance. Programmers, professors, secretaries, and pop stars do it, too. You may notice your grocer or hairdresser looking different. At a college reunion, you may find classmates who seem to have changed a lot less than you expected. Seeing results everywhere may make you yearn for a personal change. Finding out about advances in medicine can help you decide to go for it.

As people find out who is having surgery and how these people look afterward, cosmetic surgery's popularity increases. Results are becoming more natural and easier to obtain. If you're considering surgery yourself, finding out that science has made leaps and bounds in anesthesia, antibiotics, and surgical techniques is reassuring. Learning about the training and specializations that plastic surgeons undertake helps you understand that it works and why it works.

Living dangerously for beauty?

If you read about fashion and surf the 'Net, you may have read that the first cosmetic surgery was performed on Victorian women who underwent surgical removal of their ribs in order to conform to the Victorian emphasis on small waists. This is a myth. Fatality rates for amputations performed in the mid-1800s were high. With odds like these, it's hard to imagine anyone voluntarily having surgery:

- ✓ **Forearm:** 13 percent
- ✓ **Arm:** 52 percent
- ✓ **Leg:** 50 percent
- ✓ **Thigh:** 85 percent

Finding Out Who's Going under the Knife

Although cosmetic surgery used to be for the rich and famous, now everyone is doing it. From school teachers to trial lawyers to real estate agents, all kinds of people are opting for cosmetic surgery. If your job puts you before the public, you may be particularly interested in cosmetic surgery.

With such a surge in popularity of cosmetic surgery, it may be easier to put your finger on who's *not* going under the knife than who is. Certain religions or sects frown on personal adornment, let alone cosmetic surgery. And if you have certain health problems — you're a smoker or diabetic, for example — having cosmetic surgery may not be possible. (Chapter 7 tells you more about which conditions make surgery risky.) But if you've got the desire and have the money and the time, options abound for fixing pretty much whatever bothers you about the skin you're in.

Men get into the act

If you think only women are interested in improving their appearance, you're a little off base. Statistics show that 82 percent of all cosmetic surgery consumers are women. That's still pretty high when compared to men, but 18 percent is nothing to sneeze at. Business, a longer life span, public acceptance, and more openness about the subject all combine to make many men comfortable with an exploration of cosmetic surgery.

Many men want the same procedures as women. Rhinoplasty, eyelid lifts, and liposuction are popular. Generally, cosmetic surgery for men is modified from the female version of the same procedure. Often that means less extreme. In facial surgery, the placement of incisions is different because men need their scars hidden behind a male hairstyle or receding hairline.

Young people take the leap

If you think cosmetic surgery is only for the 45-and-above crowd, think again. In 2003, almost 336,000 teens 18 or younger had some kind of cosmetic surgery or procedure, a 50 percent increase over 2002. The most popular procedures for this age group were facial peels and nose reshaping. Breast augmentation and liposuction were way down on the list. Naturally, parental consent is needed for patients under 18.

Cosmetic surgery among those between 19 and 25 years old also is exploding. Young women seeking breast augmentation and liposuction, as well as nose reshaping (rhinoplasty) are heading to their plastic surgeons in droves

and getting the inside scoop on what's possible. Although many still turn to older adults for support and money, this group is completely comfortable with the idea of aesthetic improvement. Young adults read the magazines and view the shows that deal with this topic. They are also seeking romance, so how they look and feel about themselves is an important concern. They're not going to suffer in silence; they're going to get it fixed.

Surgery for the older set

Clearly, both men and women want to look good at any age. Today, even many older people — people who are capable and fit and often still employed — don't want to look their age. They know that modern culture and the business world are often prejudiced against them. A youthful appearance can often be the key to keeping a job, and cosmetic surgery is the way to achieve that look.

The good news is that cosmetic surgery done by a qualified and trained plastic surgeon in a good facility is generally safe at any age. Age is no barrier to someone healthy, but surgeons may adapt or modify surgeries for people past age 65. For example, most anesthesiologists begin to set limits on the amount of surgery that can be performed, and surgeons would perform less-extensive body contouring procedures for this age group. Happily, older people are more concerned with how they look in clothes rather than out of them, so this approach a good match.

More and more of the over-65 group — including people in and out of the workplace — are also seeking solutions to issues with their appearance, regardless of whether they feel discriminated against or not. When these people start feeling a disconnect between what shows up in the mirror and the way they feel, many consider doing something about it rather than coping, as their parents did. This age group is more active and vital than ever. Aided by medications and living a longer life span, most want to enjoy their golden years. For some people, looking more in tune with how they feel helps makes the rewards of a long career and success even sweeter.

Investigating Issues for Kids and Teens

You probably remember or may have even experienced yourself how unforgiving children and teens can be to the kids that don't fit it. Although cosmetic surgery can't change your kid's IQ or height, it can solve some issues that can significantly change appearance — protruding ears, large noses, or weak chins. In cases of severe acne, teens and their parents often decide on laser peels that make high school social life easier.

Popular procedures for teens

According to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, patients 18 or younger had the following procedures in 2003:

- ✓ Chemical peel: 126,327
- ✓ Microdermabrasion: 74,722
- ✓ Nose reshaping: 42,515
- ✓ Ear surgery: 15,973
- ✓ Botox injections: 5,606
- ✓ Collagen injections: 4,094
- ✓ Sclerotherapy: 4,002
- ✓ Breast augmentation: 3,841
- ✓ Male breast reduction*: 3,033
- ✓ Liposuction: 3,017

* Breast reduction in women is considered reconstructive surgery.

If you're a parent who wants your child to avoid the stigma of these issues, you may be open to having whatever concerns your child has surgically corrected. You need to be particularly sensitive to your child's own desires and dig deep to find the real problem. Foisting a surgical procedure on an immature young person (even for his benefit) is a recipe for disaster. It's best if your child or teen expresses the desire first. Then you want to be sure he or she is engaged every step of the way and fully understands what is involved before, during, and after the surgery. The child also needs to fully understand and be realistic about outcomes. If you're considering helping your teen through this process, ask your child for his or her opinion and then listen carefully to his or her responses.

You need to be careful when deciding upon surgery for a teenager. Teens are still growing, so their bodies continue to develop and, in some cases, develop a lot. Hormonal activity continues to shift. Maturity and clearheadedness about expectations are other issues to consider. You need to be cautious when choosing a surgeon. You'll want someone who is sensitive to these issues and develops rapport with your child or teenager.



More than for any other age group, if you are considering cosmetic surgery for your child or teen, you want to consult with several qualified surgeons and be sure that everyone agrees about the best course for your child.

Evaluating Your Motivations

So you may be you are asking yourself, “Do I *need* cosmetic surgery?” My answer is that no one *needs* cosmetic surgery. You may *want* to have it, but don’t kid yourself: If you decide to have surgery, it’s because you’ve identified it as something you *want* to do.

Ultimately, only you can decide what’s best for you. You do have some things to consider when making the decision. Evaluate what you consider to be your flaws. Sure, other people may identify as flaws the very things that irk you, your quirky and unique features, but *only* if you’re bothered by them, really bothered, should you consider doing something. Keep track for a while of how often these flaws surface in your mind.



If you think of them every day, you have more reason to go forward than if you remember a flaw once a year when you pull a particular outfit from the closet. Journaling or even keeping a notepad where you tick off the times during a day or week when your mind lingers upon what you don’t like about your appearance will help you evaluate how important this concern is to you.

Maybe some mornings you’re brushing your teeth or hair and notice that you just don’t look as good as you feel. Or a snapshot shows up those things about your appearance you’d rather not see. You may be shopping for clothes and suddenly realize you’ve got to do something after you see yourself in a full-length, three-way mirror. You may shrug and say, “Oh well, I’m getting older” and go on about your life. Or you may think, “Maybe I can improve upon Mother Nature, but more along the lines of a tune-up and oil change.” Or you may want a complete overhaul — your own *Extreme Makeover*.



You may not want to be a fashion model, but you may want to wear the current fashions. You may not want to look like an actor but still want to look as successful as you feel on the job. Go through the process of evaluating carefully. Get real with yourself. After all, surgery is never something to be taken lightly. You may realize that you’re okay with your looks — or you may really want an improvement.

If you discover through tracking and asking the hard questions that you really do want to make a change, grant yourself permission. Check out Chapter 2 for more details about making your decision.

Depending on your philosophy, comfort level, desire for change, budget, and willingness to take risks, you will decide if, how much, and how extensively you want to change your appearance. You may be one of those people who, after making sure you can afford it, decide to “go for the gold.” If you’re like these folks, you decide that if you’re going to have surgery, then you want to correct all the things about your appearance that bother you. Or you may instead choose to take things more slowly, focusing on one procedure to see what kind of difference it makes in how you look and feel. If you have a great experience, then you may want to go back for more.

Shopping for Cosmetic Surgery

If you’re thinking about having cosmetic surgery and starting your shopping process, you’re going to be confronted with a lot of acronyms and you may feel like you’ve been dropped into a bowl of alphabet soup. Trying to make sense of who is who and what is what in the wide world of cosmetic surgery isn’t easy. Between your friends, advertising, and the popular press, you can gather lots of good information, but unfortunately, you’ll hear some things that are either misleading or downright wrong. Misinformation abounds in the field of cosmetic surgery. You need to play detective to get to the truth. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 give you all the information you need to shop for — and find — the right surgeon.

Shopping may or may not be your thing, but when you’re shopping for cosmetic surgery, you better know what you’re doing or you could really endanger yourself. You need to shop intelligently after first finding out how to proceed. You need recommendations or leads, and you must get estimates of the cost so you can budget. (Chapter 6 discusses the financial issues.) You have to find a good surgeon and explore your surgical options (which you can read about in Part III). This may sound like a lot of work, but spending your time finding out how to shop for a surgeon is a lot better than spending time regretting your decision.

If you want to find a good surgeon, you have to educate yourself. You have to make sense of certification (see Chapter 3) so that you can evaluate the doctors you’ll visit. Be on the lookout for someone well educated, properly trained, board-certified, and experienced in the procedure you’ve decided on. You want to be sure that your surgery is being performed in a safe setting with an appropriate anesthesia provider. You also want to choose a capable patient-care team to see you through the preparation and recovery process.

More importantly, you’ll have to determine the risk-to-benefit ratio. It sounds scientific and tough to do, but really it isn’t. Every surgery has risk factors, but every surgery also benefits the patient in some way. As an intelligent person, you’ll want to know about the risks (which I discuss in Chapter 17) and weigh the benefits — in other words, become an informed consumer — before finally making your decision.



Finding Dr. Right

Beverly, a 60-year-old retired elementary principal with seven grandchildren, inherited her mother's and grandmother's tendency to wrinkle and decided to pursue facial surgery. She felt that as a professional woman she needed to look younger and healthier.

She approached the process of choosing a surgeon seriously. Beverly wanted to know their skills, so she did her Internet research. She developed a group of questions to compare surgeons and facilities. She decided to have consults with three surgeons, all of whom were board-certified plastic surgeons with accredited facilities. She determined that the three surgeons produced similar quality results.

Beverly based her ultimate decision on a variety of factors she could discern only in on-site consultation visits. Here's what she had to say about making her decision, "Actually, I liked another surgeon's personality better, but the surgeon I chose recorded his thoughts and assessments and sent a follow-up letter. He was professional and knowledgeable. The nurses and front office

staff were professional, reassuring, and knowledgeable. They really were the deciding factor with my list of pros and cons for surgeons and facilities."

Her advice if you're considering cosmetic surgery: "Do research, ask questions, and go into surgery with total confidence in the surgeon, facility, and the staff — especially the nurses. Go for it! This is one area I would never look for a 'bargain.' While cost is a factor, it is better to save for a few more months than accept anything but the best surgeon."

And did her system work? Here's what she has to say about her ultimate result and the impact on her life: "My eyes look livelier, and the forehead wrinkles have decreased. I have more self-confidence that people will see the *real* me when they look at my face. I recently interviewed for a job, knowing that I looked my best, and I was hired. My life hasn't changed — I have an active, fun, interesting life. What has changed is that my face matches my energetic youthful feeling."

Being Realistic about Recovery and Results

Sometimes being realistic is a challenge, but if you're considering cosmetic surgery, you'll need to know what's possible and more likely to happen. Aligning your expectations with what is really possible makes for a successful surgery. An obese person who wants liposuction to substitute for dieting and good health habits isn't being realistic. If he imagines that he'll suddenly have the smooth body of a weightlifter, he'll be terribly disappointed. But someone who's already lost massive amounts of weight and wants a body lift to remove the extra skin is more realistic and may be very happy so long as he understands the scarring involved. Be fully informed and accept what your surgeon can and cannot do. Yes, lots of patients call their procedures "miracles," but remember these are scientific miracles, limited and on a human scale.

You also need to be realistic about your recovery (see Chapter 18). You can take steps yourself to positively affect your recovery, including being in great physical shape and creating the necessary time and conditions to rest and heal. Don't imagine that recovery is instantaneous. Your recovery will take time, so plan for it.



Life is unpredictable, and sometimes, even with the best of surgeons, things can go wrong or complications arise. You'll want to know how the practice you've chosen handles these situations. Find out what to expect from the doctor, the nurse, or other team members. Also find out in advance what complications are normal for this procedure and whether there's anything you can do to help prevent them. For example, you'll want to be completely honest with your surgeon about your health history, the medications you take, drug allergies, other sensitivities, and specific health conditions. Although you may think these things may be unrelated to plastic surgery, let the doctors — the surgeon and anesthesiologist — work with the most information to get you the best result. Many offices handle complications well, wholeheartedly support their patients, and fully resolve any problems. Look for a practice with that motivation and reputation.

If you go by the numbers, your surgical experience will be a happy one. You'll come through surgery with a normal healing phase and reenter your life feeling better about your appearance and with a better self-image — like you've had an emotional facelift.