the Consumer’s Guide
to Plastic Surgery

Questions to ask your doctor and other helpful tips and information
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction - Considering Plastic Surgery? • pg 1

Are You Ready? • pg 1

The Consultation: 5 Essential Questions to Ask Your Surgeon • pg 2

The Surgical Facility • pg 3

What You Should Know about Anesthesia • pg 4

Top Procedures: Liposuction & Breast Augmentation • pg 5

Is Liposuction for You? • pg 6

Breast Enhancement Basics • pg 8

Paying for Plastic Surgery • pg 10

A Final Note • pg 11

Bibliography • pg 11
About the Author

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When not writing professionally, Bridgett likes to blog, read and spend time with her husband (not necessarily in that order).

Considering Plastic Surgery?

This is an exciting time to consider plastic surgery. New technologies are being developed every year, and existing ones are always being improved on to make plastic surgery safer and more successful than ever. Couple this with a growing cultural acceptance of cosmetic plastic surgery, and it’s no surprise that more than 10 million Americans have some kind of cosmetic procedure annually.

In fact, the number of people undergoing plastic surgery steadily rises each year, and patients are increasingly diverse. Plastic surgery isn’t just for the wealthy. Nor is it just for women. Nowadays plastic surgery has an extremely broad appeal – from baby boomers and stay-at-home moms to career seekers and ethnic minorities.

What makes cosmetic surgery so popular is its ability not only to enhance physical appearance, but to improve a person’s confidence and self-esteem. Everyone deserves to feel good about themselves and sometimes plastic surgery can provide that extra boost a person needs. While the potential benefits of cosmetic surgery can be significant, it always deserves serious consideration.

Are You Ready?

Making the decision to undergo plastic surgery is not one to be taken lightly. Prior to making a commitment, you should ask yourself a few questions to help determine if you’re really ready:

• *Why am I choosing plastic surgery?* – This is one of the most important questions you can answer for yourself. Make sure that you want to enhance your appearance for your own satisfaction and no one else’s. The decision needs to be yours, regardless of any pressure or influence you may feel by those around you.

• *What are my goals and expectations?* – Although plastic surgery can do much in the way of improving your appearance and your self-esteem, it’s necessary to have realistic expectations about what the procedure(s) you have chosen can do for you.

• *Do I fully understand the potential risks involved?* – No surgical procedure is without risks. If you have questions or concerns about the risks associated with any procedure you’re considering, make sure to discuss them with your doctor beforehand.
• **Am I in good mental and physical health?** – If you are being treated for any mental or physical health disorders, or if you’re experiencing a time of emotional stress and upheaval, it’s best to postpone the surgery until any personal issues have been worked out. If you are a smoker, ask yourself if you’re prepared to give up the habit for at least two to four weeks prior to and after surgery (the longer you quit, the better). Smoking and surgery do not mix: Nicotine impairs the body’s ability to heal and can cause serious surgical/post-surgical complications.

• **How will I cope with the recovery process?** – Plastic surgery can be a life-altering experience, and some people may feel sad, exhausted or stressed during their recovery. It may help to have a loved one to support you through the recovery process, both physically and mentally.

Also, you should be prepared for others to express their opinions about the results of your plastic surgery, and there may be some who express criticism. Remember, however, that as long as you’re happy with the results, yours is the only opinion that matters.

**The Initial Consultation**
This is your time to find out crucial information from the doctor. During the consultation, you can find out more about the doctor’s training, experience, certification, and areas of expertise. Equally important, you can determine whether or not the doctor is professional and attentive to your needs and goals. Keep in mind that plastic surgery is a major undertaking, and the doctor you choose will largely determine your results.

**5 Essential Questions to Ask Your Plastic Surgeon**

1. **Are you certified by the American Board of Plastic Surgery?** – It is imperative that you choose a surgeon who is board certified, as this is evidence that he or she has received the necessary education and training to practice plastic surgery.

2. **Where will the procedure(s) be performed?** – Specifically, you want to find out if the surgical facility is properly accredited and if the doctor has staff privileges at any of the local hospitals.

3. **What is your experience with this procedure(s)?** – Plastic surgeons may concentrate their practice on several areas of expertise. For instance, a plastic surgeon who focuses primarily on facial procedures may not be the best choice for a breast augmentation. If you ask to see a portfolio of before and after photos, remember that these provide no guarantee as to individual results. However, asking for a portfolio is a good opportunity.
to question the doctor about any complications his or her patients have experienced and how those complications were handled.

4. *Do you consider me a good candidate for plastic surgery?* – Find out if the plastic surgeon has any reservations about your candidacy for the procedure(s). The best plastic surgeons are those who put their patients’ interests before their own.

5. *What should I expect in terms of the procedure, results and recovery?* – Make sure the surgeon fully explains the risks involved and what you should anticipate after surgery.

**A Few Caveats**
As with any consumer endeavor, the buyer should always beware. This is especially true when plastic surgery is involved since your health is at stake. If any of the following red flags are present, it may be best to explore other options:

- You are not asked to sign an informed consent document
- You are not given specific instructions for things to do before and after your procedure
- You are not given a general health evaluation to determine your fitness for surgery
- You are asked to commit to surgery right then and even offered an incentive to do so
- You are not given a cost estimate for your procedure(s)
- You are offered additional procedures – ones that are not related to your intended goals

Also, be wary of surgeons who downplay risks or guarantee results. While a skilled surgeon knows how to minimize the risks of a procedure, no surgeon can fully predict patient outcomes. Each patient is unique, and a good surgeon will take the time to explain what you can reasonably expect from your procedure(s).

**Where Will the Procedure Be Performed?**
The majority of plastic surgery procedures are actually performed outside of hospitals, often in freestanding surgical centers or office-based facilities. If your surgery is going to be performed in an independent surgical facility, there are a couple of things you should know.

First, surgery performed in such a facility is not regulated by the federal government. Each state has its own set of laws for regulating independent surgical facilities and it’s up to you to find out what the laws are in your state.

Second, find out if the facility is accredited by and in good standing with one of the following:

- The American Association for Accreditation of Ambulatory Surgery Facilities (AAAASF)
- The Accreditation Association for Ambulatory Health Care (AAAHC)
Both of these organizations require member facilities to meet certain standards. For example, they generally require member facilities to: 1) undergo and pass regular peer reviews and safety inspections; 2) employ appropriately trained and licensed staff; 3) meet specific emergency standards.

You should also find out from your plastic surgeon what would happen in case of an emergency. For instance, ask where the nearest hospital is and if the surgeon has privileges there.

The bottom line is this: Independent surgical facilities can be just as safe as hospitals but, as with other aspects of your procedure, information is key.

**Going Under: What You Should Know about Anesthesia**

The type of anesthesia you are given will largely depend on the type of surgery you’ve chosen. For more invasive procedures, general anesthesia is still commonly used to induce a loss of consciousness and eliminate the sensation of pain. Your surgeon will evaluate the best type of anesthesia given your particular circumstances.

However, it’s essential that you disclose your full medical history (including whether or not you smoke) to your doctor as this will help prevent any possible complications. Asking your surgeon a few basic questions will also help to ensure your safety. For instance:

- What are the risks associated with the anesthesia I will be given?
- Will an anesthesiologist be administering my anesthesia, or will it be administered by a nurse anesthetist or physician’s assistant?
- Who will be monitoring my anesthesia throughout the procedure(s)?
- What should I expect when coming out of the anesthesia?

Your surgeon should be willing and able to answer any and all questions you have related to your surgery. In fact, this is part of your surgeon’s duty. Responsible surgeons understand that the more information the patient has, the better. It’s the only way patients can make knowledgeable and safe choices.
Top Procedures: Liposuction & Breast Augmentation

Year after year, liposuction and breast augmentation top the list of most sought after cosmetic surgery procedures. Both of these procedures have high rates of success and patient satisfaction – even the most subtle of changes created by liposuction and/or breast augmentation can greatly improve a patient’s self-esteem.

Nevertheless, patients should have realistic expectations as to what these procedures can achieve in terms of results and also fully understand the risks and benefits before undergoing surgery. Below is some general information on each of these procedures, as well as guidelines and questions to consider when choosing a surgeon.

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*Source: American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery*
Liposuction

Liposuction is second only to breast augmentation in terms of its popularity. Hundreds of thousands of Americans – men and women, young and old – undergo this procedure every year to remove persistent areas of fat and enhance their physical appearance.

Essentially a form of surgical body sculpting, liposuction is a procedure used to remove localized deposits of fat in areas such as the:

- Abdomen
- Hips and thighs
- Buttocks
- Upper arms
- Knees
- Ankles
- Back
- Chin and neck

One of the first steps in making the decision to have liposuction is to ask yourself whether or not you’re a good candidate. **Liposuction is best for individuals who are close to their goal weight** and in good physical health but need help targeting problem areas or improving proportion.

Ideal candidates also have realistic expectations about what the procedure can accomplish and understand that liposuction cannot treat obesity, nor can it eliminate cellulite or improve loose, sagging skin. These conditions require other procedures/treatments which your surgeon can discuss with you if you’re interested.

The Liposuction Procedure

Liposuction is typically performed as an outpatient procedure, during which the patient is given general anesthesia or intravenous sedation. Once anesthesia has taken effect, tiny incisions are made (the number of which depends on how many areas are treated) for the insertion of a tool known as a cannula. This thin, hollow tube is used to dislodge and suction out excess fat.

- **Recovery** – The length of surgery will vary according to how many sites are being targeted and the amount of fat removed. These factors also influence the recovery time. Generally, however, patients can return to work within a few days to a few weeks depending on the size and number of areas involved.

Your surgeon should provide you with specific instructions on what to expect during your recovery, and you should always contact your doctor immediately if you start to develop any complications.
• **Risks** – All surgical procedures carry risks, and some of the risks associated with liposuction include asymmetry, numbness, infection, blood clots, pain, swelling, nerve damage, and complications associated with the anesthesia.

You can minimize your risks by maintaining good health, choosing a board certified plastic surgeon and following closely your physician’s instructions. To make sure your surgeon is qualified, ask how many liposuction procedures he or she performs in a year and also ask for patient references.

• **Results** – Patients typically see results within the first few days after surgery, but in rare cases it can take up to six months for the swelling to fully subside. One of the greatest benefits of liposuction, in addition to improved body shape and self-esteem, is the long-lasting results. With proper diet and exercise, the results can be maintained indefinitely.

Additional procedures may help to maximize results. For instance, one procedure often performed in combination with liposuction is abdominoplasty – more commonly known as a tummy tuck.

**Is Abdominoplasty Right for You?**

Some people are genetically prone to a protruding abdomen, and others find themselves with one after childbirth or significant weight gain and loss. Such individuals may benefit from an abdominoplasty procedure. Of course, the procedure is not for everyone and your surgeon will help you determine whether or not abdominoplasty is right for you.

**About the Procedure**

During a tummy tuck, underlying abdominal muscles may be tightened and excess fat, skin and tissue are removed. The result is a firmer, flatter abdomen. Though swelling may take months to fully dissipate, results are generally permanent. As is the case with liposuction, significant weight gain after the procedure can reverse the results. Also, women who want to get pregnant should postpone abdominoplasty until after pregnancy.

Risks tummy tuck candidates should take into consideration include scarring, fluid build-up, persistent pain, asymmetry, infection and blood clots. Make sure you discuss these risks with your surgeon, and follow any special instructions to minimize possible complications.
Breast Augmentation

Breast augmentation is an extremely popular cosmetic procedure, and for good reason – the procedure offers many benefits including:

- Enhanced fullness and contouring of the breasts
- Improved proportion
- Increased self-confidence

Women choose to have their breasts augmented for a variety of reasons, but ideal candidates typically include women who:

- feel self-conscious of their breast size or shape
- have asymmetrical breasts
- have decreased fullness because of weight loss, aging, or childbirth and nursing

As with any cosmetic procedure, the best candidates are those who understand what the surgery can realistically achieve and are in good physical and mental health.

Saline vs. Silicone Implants

When it comes to choosing breast implants, women now have a couple of options. In November 2006, the Food and Drug Administration re-approved silicone breast implants for use in women over the age of 22. Both silicone and saline implants have certain advantages and disadvantages which patients should carefully consider:

- **Saline** implants consist of a solid silicone shell filled with a salt-water solution. The implants feature a valve, which makes adding or removing saline solution after surgery a relatively easy process. Also, saline implant ruptures are almost immediately apparent since the implant will deflate as the solution is released into the body.

- **Silicone** implants consist of a solid silicone shell filled with a silicone gel. Silicone gel has a texture similar to breast tissue, and this tends to lend the implants a more natural look and feel. However, there are a few drawbacks to the silicone implant – The size can only be changed by replacing the implant in a surgical procedure, and a ruptured silicone implant is not as easily detected. Consequently, women with silicone implants are required to undergo regular MRI screenings to detect possible silent ruptures.

Prior to surgery, you will have an opportunity to try on different implant types, shapes and size. You will also be able to discuss your goals with your surgeon, who can help you determine the best implant for achieving those goals.
Breast Augmentation Procedures

Like liposuction, breast augmentation is often performed as an outpatient procedure and the patient is either given general anesthesia or intravenous sedation (though there are exceptions). During your initial consultation(s), you and your surgeon will have discussed your incision and implant placement options. Your desired outcome, the size and type of your implant, and your surgeon’s recommendation will influence whether the implant is placed:

• Above or below the pectoral muscle

• By way of an incision under the nipple (periareolar), beneath the fold of the breast (inframammary), in the armpit (transaxillary) or through the navel (transumbilical)

Once the implants are placed, the incisions are closed and the patient is prepared for recovery. The procedure itself takes between one and two hours, and the results are immediately apparent.

• **Recovery** – Breast augmentation patients can expect some bruising and soreness for the first couple of days after the procedure. Most patients are able to return to work after about a week or so and resume regular activities within three or four weeks. Recovery time may take longer if other procedures are performed at the same time as the breast augmentation.

• **Risks** – Among the risks of breast augmentation are asymmetry, infection, capsular contracture (occurs when scar tissue forms around the implant), loss of sensation, pain, blood clots, and complications of the anesthesia. Patients should also be aware that implants may obscure mammogram results.

You should address any concerns you have about these and other risks with your surgeon prior to surgery. Being informed can help you minimize any potential complications of your breast augmentation procedure.

• **Results** – It may take several months for the breasts to settle and the swelling to dissipate, but patients will notice improved shape and appearance immediately. The results are long-lasting, but significant weight changes and aging may eventually alter the shape of the breasts. Also, breast implants are not considered lifetime devices and may need to be replaced at some point in the future.

Do You Need a Lift?

Some breast augmentation patients may also benefit from a breast lift, or mastopexy. This procedure is not always necessary, but it is often recommended to lift sagging breasts since a breast augmentation alone will not correct excessive drooping. Your surgeon will help you determine if a breast lift is appropriate for you. If you are a candidate for
a breast lift, you can expect that the procedure will be done at the same time as your augmentation.

In some cases, a woman may opt for a breast lift without augmentation. However, implants may be recommended to recreate a firmer, fuller and perkier breast.

**About the Breast Lift Procedure**

During a breast lift procedure, the surgeon will make an incision (or series of incisions) that will allow for the underlying breast tissue to be raised and reshaped. The nipple and areola are then repositioned accordingly, and excess skin and tissue are removed.

Patients should expect swelling and soreness after the procedure, but the soreness should subside within several days and the swelling over the course of a few months. The benefits and risks of a breast lift are similar to those of a breast augmentation, although lifting of the breast often requires one or more incisions that may leave visible scars.

Women who are planning to get pregnant may wish to postpone a breast lift until after pregnancy as it may stretch the skin and alter the results of the procedure. Breast procedures such as augmentation and/or lift may also affect a woman’s ability to breastfeed.

**Paying for Your Plastic Surgery**

The cost of your plastic surgery will depend on a number of factors such as:

- The type and number of procedures you plan to have
- The surgeon you choose
- The facility, anesthesia and any additional fees related to the procedure(s)

For instance, a breast augmentation costs about $4,000 and up, and liposuction can range from $1,500 to $5,000 per target area. Though cost is a significant factor to consider, it should not be the only factor. Cost does not determine quality, and surgeons who charge more are not necessarily better. Remember that no surgeon can guarantee results. On the other hand, **be wary of surgeons who offer deals that are too good to be true.** When your health is at stake, it’s always in your best interest to take into consideration your surgeon’s experience and the safety of the facility where the procedure(s) will be performed.

You can find out more about your payment options during your initial consultation, but your options generally include:

- Cash
- Credit*
- Financing

*CareCredit is available through Dr. Mark Rechnic’s medical practice.
Not all plastic surgery practices offer financing plans, but some individuals may apply or qualify for alternative financing options. For example, the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS) endorses a payment plan known as CareCredit®. It essentially works like a credit card but can only be used for healthcare services such as cosmetic surgery.

**A Final Note**

Millions of Americans have reaped the benefits of plastic surgery. Cosmetic surgery has the power to positively impact the lives of those who seek it, but surgery also carries risks and it’s important for prospective patients to fully understand the risks involved.

The significance of making informed decisions with regard to plastic surgery cannot be emphasized enough. The more you know about the qualifications of your surgeon and the procedure(s) you have chosen, the better your chances for a safe and successful outcome.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


