

A dirt path winds through a forest with green trees and fallen leaves. The path is covered in brown leaves and dirt, leading into the distance. The trees are tall and thin, with green foliage. The lighting is soft, suggesting a forest setting.

# How to Choose a Plastic Surgeon: What Criteria to Look For

Many patients begin their search for a plastic surgeon after months or in some cases years of contemplating a surgical procedure. Often times, the first question we are asked when contacted by a patient is:

“How much is this gonna cost?”



Although price is a major concern of some patients, it should not be the sole consideration when making the choice of who your plastic surgeon will be. Rather, your initial focus should be directed towards the credentials of the surgeon. When considering a surgical procedure it is important to do your research on a physician and make sure all of the pieces fall into place.

So what should my first question be?

# Are you board certified?



- What does board certification mean?
  - Board certification is the best indicator of a doctor's training in a particular medical specialty. Medical specialty certification is a voluntary process meaning it is not required in order to practice medicine like a medical license is. While medical licensure sets the minimum competency requirements, it is not specialty specific. Board certification demonstrates a physician's exceptional expertise in a particular area of medical practice. For example, an dermatologist would be certified by the American Board of Dermatology. A primary care physician would be certified by the American Board of Family Medicine. Plastic Surgeons are certified by the American Board of Plastic Surgery.

- How does a doctor become board certified?
  - Certification involves a rigorous process of testing and peer evaluation that is designed and administered by specialists in that specific area of medicine. Once a physician has become board certified, there are certain criteria which must be met on an annual basis in order to maintain that certification. One such criteria is continuing medical education. Physicians are required to complete a minimum number of hours of continuing medical education courses every year and a certain amount of these courses must pertain to their particular medical specialty. Physicians are also required to periodically pass a competency exam in their specialized field of practice. Remember, we are discussing only physicians who are board certified. So, if your doctor is not board certified, they are not being held to these standards of care.

- What if my plastic surgeon is not board certified?
  - If your doctor is not board certified, it does not mean that they do not have a license to practice medicine. It simply means they may not have training in the field of plastic surgery. Your physician could be trained in any medical field, from general surgery to dermatology, in some cases even dentistry.
  - Being board certified means that a physician is held to a higher standard which results in better care for patients.
- Where do I go to find out if my doctor is board certified?
  - One website where patients can look up board certification is: [www.certificationmatters.org](http://www.certificationmatters.org)
  - For a plastic surgeon, you can also go to the website of The American Board of Plastic Surgery at: [www.abplsurg.org](http://www.abplsurg.org)

# Plastic Surgeon vs. Cosmetic Surgeon

- Often times, patients are unaware of the difference between a cosmetic surgeon and a plastic surgeon. It may seem that these terms represent the same thing but, in fact, they are different. A cosmetic surgeon is any physician who performs procedures to enhance one's physical appearance. There are no special requirements (i.e. board certification) to advertise as a cosmetic surgeon. Therefore, the training and background of a cosmetic surgeon can be in any medical field. In order to advertise as a plastic surgeon, a physician must complete a minimum two year residency program in which they specialize in the field of plastic surgery.



# Are you a member of a Professional Plastic Surgery Society?

- Why is membership in a society important?
  - There are two main plastic surgery societies: The American Society of Plastic Surgery and The American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery. In order to qualify for membership in either society, a physician must first be board certified. Membership in one of these societies, goes one step further than board certification though. It requires that physicians have significant experience in the practice of plastic surgery. Through membership, physicians are held to the highest standards of training and ethics. Physicians are also required to practice surgery only in accredited surgical facilities which ensures the safest possible conditions for patients.
- How do I know if a physician is a member of one of these societies?
  - In most cases, the physician will advertise membership on their website or in their print ads. Often times, you will see the membership symbols such as the ones below in their advertisements. You can also find membership rosters on either of the society websites.

For The American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery you may visit

[www.surgery.org](http://www.surgery.org)

For The American Society of Plastic Surgery you may visit

[www.plasticsurgery.org](http://www.plasticsurgery.org).

Member



AMERICAN SOCIETY OF  
PLASTIC SURGEONS



MEMBER OF THE AMERICAN SOCIETY  
FOR AESTHETIC PLASTIC SURGERY

# Do you perform surgery at an accredited facility?



- What is an accredited facility?
  - An accredited facility is one that has passed a rigorous external review of equipment and staffing. Cosmetic surgery can be safely performed in a hospital, a surgery center, or an office-based surgical facility. However, according to The American Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery, the majority of office-based surgical facilities are not accredited.

# Do you have hospital privileges?

- In order to be granted operating privileges at a hospital, a physician's training and competency must first be reviewed by a hospital committee. This committee will thoroughly check the doctor's background before allowing him or her to perform specific surgical procedures. By checking that the doctor has hospital privileges for a specific procedure, you are ensuring that he or she has gone through this thorough review process.
- Make sure you are also asking the following question: "Are you credentialed to perform the specific surgery I am interested in?"



# Consultation Stage

- Once you have verified that the physician is board certified, a member of a professional plastic surgery society, performs surgeries in an accredited facility, and is credentialed by a hospital to perform the procedure you are interested in, it would now be the right time to schedule a consultation appointment. This initial appointment is important because it gives you the opportunity to:
  - **Check the thoroughness of the physician.**
    - This is your chance to ask questions. You and your doctor should have a candid discussion about the surgery including the risks involved as well as benefits. Your doctor should give a detailed description of the complete surgical experience. He or she should also take this time to review your medical history in order to tailor the operation to best meet your individual needs and communicate realistic post-surgical expectations.
  - **Check the doctor-patient rapport.**
    - Making sure you have a good rapport with your physician is important in ensuring the best possible surgical experience.
  - **Check experience.**
    - Patients should ask about a surgeon's experience with the particular procedure being considered. If considering a "new" technique or technology, patients should inquire whether results substantiating safety and effectiveness have been published in a peer-reviewed journal.
  - **Check follow-up care.**
    - Great surgical care does not end with the surgery. Patients should inquire about follow-up visits and about the doctor's policies should surgical revisions be necessary.

## And finally:



- “How much will this cost?”
  - Have you ever heard the saying “If it sounds too good to be true it probably is”? Deciding to have a procedure based on price alone may not be the safest way to pick a surgeon. So make sure you are choosing wisely and do your research before undergoing any surgical procedure.