

# Plastic Surgery

## Selecting a Plastic Surgeon

by J. Timothy Katzen, MD

Selecting the proper plastic surgeon may be one of the most important decisions you will ever make. The following are many of the key elements you should consider in selecting your surgeon.

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**Board Certification:** One of the most important credentials a physician can have is to be board certified within his field of specialty. In the competitive and lucrative field of plastic surgery, it is easy to become confused. To be board certified in plastic surgery, one must have a certificate from the American Board of Plastic Surgery. One of the difficulties is that there are so many boards. The patients can easily become confused as to what the real boards are. Some boards do not even require the doctor to pass a test to get in but rather pay a small membership fee. The only true plastic surgery board is the American Board of Plastic Surgery. This board is sanctioned and recognized by the American Board of Medical Specialties, which is a branch of the American Medical Association. There are assorted other names of plastic surgeons, including cosmetic surgeons, to which any physician can belong. This means a pediatrician or a radiologist can become a cosmetic surgeon. In addition, the American Board of Head and Neck Surgery Otolaryngology are deemed to be qualified to perform cosmetic surgery of only the head and neck region.

**Credentialing:** FACS. These 4 letters signify that your plastic surgeon is a Fellow of the American College of Surgeons. This is a very prestigious college with a very long history. The American College of Surgeons is one of the most reputable and best established surgical organizations in the world. Only board certified plastic surgeons are admitted to this board. Again, it becomes very confusing for the patients because other societies have adopted very similar sounding letters.

**Hospital Affiliation:** It is very important to know which hospitals your plastic surgeon has an affiliation with. If your surgeon has no hospitals and only operates out of his surgery center, there may have been problems with his credentials. If the hospital has a good name, chances are your plastic surgeon has gone through the extensive scrutiny of that hospital's medical system to have privileges in plastic surgery at that hospital.

**Reputation:** A plastic surgeon's reputation takes years to build. It is the single most important known academic quality your plastic surgeon can have. It is often difficult to determine a plastic surgeon's reputation but with time in a given community, a plastic surgeon develops a reputation.

**Training:** It is very important to note which college, medical school, and residencies your plastic surgeon attended. Look at these very carefully. Only true plastic surgeons complete plastic surgery residencies.

**Fellowship Training:** Has your plastic surgeon had extensive training? Most legitimate plastic surgery fellowships should last 1 year.

**Bedside Manner:** Is your plastic surgeon approachable? Does he seem friendly? Does he ignore your questions and keep looking at the clock? Will he take your call when you have a problem or delegate that responsibility?

**Referral From Your Family Doctor:** One of the best and most frequently overlooked ways to get a referral to the right doctor.

**The Consultation:** Did your plastic surgeon understand exactly what your concerns were? Did your plastic surgeon make sense in explaining how he would treat your problem? Did your plastic surgeon treat you like a patient?

**Price:** Price shopping invariably leads to very inferior and often permanent and devastating results. A legitimate plastic surgeon must maintain malpractice insurance, which is expensive, and the surgeon must have a support staff should you have a problem.

**Experience:** How long has the plastic surgeon been performing procedures? How many of these cases has he done? Can he present before and after pictures of your procedure to show you? Is the procedure that you desire a specialty of your chosen plastic surgeon? Does he like doing that procedure? Does he specialize in plastic surgery?

**Honesty:** Does your plastic surgeon convey honesty? Can you trust him? You will be trusting him with your life on the operating room table. You will be trusting him to give you the results that you so much desire.

**Innovation:** Has your plastic surgeon invented or refined any plastic surgery techniques? Has he been awarded by reputable societies within the plastic surgery societies?

**Patient Care:** Does your plastic surgeon have the demeanor and confidence that you would want in order to be his patient?

**Revisions:** Every good busy surgeon has complications. These often require usually minor revisions. What is your plastic surgeon's policy concerning revisions?

**Doubt:** If you are at all in doubt, do not go forward with plastic surgery. Plastic surgery, aside from the usual butterflies, should be an informed decision entered into confidently.

**What Is A Plastic Surgeon?** Plastic surgeons are surgeons first and then subspecialized to become plastic surgeons. On average, they have between seven and ten years of formal surgical training. Plastic surgeons do thousands of operations before they finish their plastic surgery training and are exposed to thousands of different types of procedures. Plastic surgeons have extensive experience with wound healing and infections, complications, and great wealth of wound healing knowledge. The organization representing most certified plastic surgeons is the ASPS, the double-circle symbol, the American Society of Plastic Surgeons.

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