



Success factors for cosmetic surgery

Anyone planning to undertake cosmetic surgery should do their homework before they start says Melbourne plastic surgeon **Dr Craig Rubinstein**.

We all wish to look our best and achieve our goals. Unfortunately when it comes to cosmetic surgery, services and results vary greatly, there are traps for the unwary.

Cosmetic surgery procedures, particularly the most popular breast enhancements, breast reductions, facelifts, abdominoplasty and even liposuction, are major surgical procedures in themselves. They need to be treated as such by both the doctor and the patient. Like it or not, things can and do go wrong from time to time.

Outlined below are some of the critical success factors that I believe anyone considering a cosmetic procedure should follow before selecting their surgeon and finally deciding to undertake treatment.

Qualification of the surgeon

Not all those who perform cosmetic surgery are alike, irrespective of what they tell you and how nice their rooms and staff may appear. The important issue here is that your surgeon has received formal supervised training in your

intended procedure and is not 'learning on the job'— read 'learning on you'. For major procedures such as those mentioned above, surgeons with the appropriate formal training are Fellows of the Royal Australian College of Surgeons (FRACS) who in turn are eligible to become members of the Australian Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS). No other doctors in Australia receive such formal training.

Experience of the surgeon

It is important that the surgeon you select specialises in your procedure. Ask how many such procedures they have performed in the past 12 months. Ask what complications they have had (all doctors that operate enough will have complications) and how they have dealt with them. Ask what their policy is for when outcomes need further treatment.

Only the best surgical facilities

Ensure that your procedure will be completed in a well-

equipped, safe and properly registered and resourced surgical facility. It must be capable of dealing with all aspects of your surgery. This should ideally be a hospital with a full range of emergency equipment if there are any unforeseen complications. Properly accredited day surgery centres have these, but some do not have such facilities and there may be a time delay in getting you to a major hospital should you need it.

A full surgical team

Cosmetic surgery is very significant surgery. You should insist upon the presence of not just your appropriately qualified surgeon but also an anaesthetist (with qualifications recognised by the State Medical Boards), a surgical assistant and a full theatre nursing team. Some doctors performing cosmetic procedures may exclude a full surgical team in order to lower their prices and get the sale. In my view, to do so puts you at risk. For the sake of a relatively small extra cost it is not worth it.

Ask hard questions and only accept straight answers

Your surgeon is a person like anyone else (not a god). It is important you explain exactly what you want, and the surgeon should answer very candidly whether or not this is possible. If it comes to it, the surgeon should say that what you are expecting is not possible and advise you against the procedure. If you feel that you are not getting straight answers to your questions, think twice about the surgeon. Your instincts are probably correct.

Lifetime support

Insist that your surgeon is committed to looking after you through all stages of your surgery, including recovery and long-term follow up. Make sure your doctor has not just 'flown in' for your procedure and that they will be around for a long time.

Treat the whole person

Cosmetic surgery is a very personal decision that is undertaken for many different reasons. It is important that your surgeon (and their team) understand this and deal with you as an individual not 'just another case'. This supportive environment is very important before your procedure and may be even more important afterwards.

Summary

Cosmetic surgery can be a positive, life-changing experience. It can enhance self-esteem and confidence. Please remember though that for potentially one of the most significant decisions you can make in your life, take your time and before anything, do your homework! If you follow these 'success factors' you are most likely to achieve the results you desire. **acsm**