

TAKE YOUR TIME AND DO YOUR RESEARCH WHEN SELECTING A PLASTIC SURGEON

by Scott Barttelbort, M.D.

Having plastic surgery is a major decision that can literally change your life as well as your appearance. So deciding whom you should entrust with your body is obviously a critical one that requires some careful thought and planning.

Most cosmetic surgery patients will agree that the single most important factor in a successful outcome is the selection of the plastic surgeon. The unique combination of training, experience and judgment that the surgeon brings to each case has a significant impact on the final result.

Simply stated, there is no substitute for a surgeon's experience. The way in which patients discover the surgeon's level of experience is best accomplished through a personal consultation rather than picking one out of a phone book.

These face-to-face consultations will provide the patient an opportunity to ask about the doctors' training, which universities and medical schools they attended, and how many times they've performed that particular procedure as well as the

results they achieved. They are a way for the patient and a doctor to assess one another and also discuss the risks and rewards involved. Both parties should feel comfortable with their decision to proceed.

During the consultation, patients should undergo a physical examination and provide a thorough medical history to the surgeon. There should also be some discussion of details such as where the surgery will take place, the type of anesthesia, potential complications including their frequency and treatment, recovery period and follow-up care.

Patients considering a cosmetic procedure should ask to see before and after photographs of the surgeon's results and not computerized simulations. It's important to note that photos are no guarantee that you will achieve the same outcome, and actual results depend on a number of factors, such as healing and recovery, which are not always completely controllable.

It is in the patient's best interest to select a plastic surgeon that is board-certified by the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS) because of the stringent training guidelines and qualifications imposed on its

members. Prospective patients should obtain referrals from the surgeon and check them out to determine the surgeon's ability to provide quality results in a competent and professional manner. They should also consider the surgeon's reputation and credentials, including whether they have a university or medical center teaching affiliation or where they have hospital privileges. Consumer health groups, other doctors, books, articles, and the Internet are also valuable sources of information.

Finally, potential patients should pay close attention to the surgical facility and the staff. They'll want to be sure the facility is clean, organized and well equipped, and the staff competent, professional and compassionate. Since cosmetic surgery is not an emergency procedure, there is no reason to rush into it. Don't be pressured into making a quick decision and gather as much information as you need to feel comfortable with your decision. ■

With more than 15 years of plastic and reconstructive surgery experience, Dr. Scott Barttelbort is board-certified by the American Board of Plastic Surgery, a Fellow in the American College of Surgeons, and a member of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons. He is Chief of Plastic Surgery for Scripps Memorial Hospital in La Jolla.

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