

# Nip and Tuck

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Like any other cosmetic surgery, crafting the perfect belly or lip augmentation require a lot of responsibility



Before-and-after photos help to understand what to expect from plastic surgery procedures

## Cosmetic surgery has gone mainstream

In the past the only 'cosmetic' getting near our bodies was a powdering of rouge and a smudge of lipstick. Now, thanks (or no thanks?) to a big fleshing out of the cosmetic surgery industry we can look in the mirror, poke, squeeze and scorn our imperfections and arrange for a nice man in a white coat to fix it up – for a tidy fee.

Cosmetic surgery is booming and it's no longer for the rich and famous – it's gone mainstream. Normal folk are clamouring over neater noses, firmer pecs and perter buttocks with the aptly named BAAPS (British Association of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons) reporting that surgical procedures were up by more than a third in 2005 over the previous year. Blame the magazines, blame the movies, blame the catwalks, blame who you like, but the modern world is a body-conscious one and even when faced with a list of risks and potential complications, under the knife we go.

Television has leapt on the bandwagon ready to highlight the good, bad and downright ugly sides of cosmetic surgery. Flamboyant Dead or Alive vocalist Pete Burns presented his 'Cosmetic Surgery Nightmares' on ITV1 in November, personally admitting to more than 100 corrective surgical procedures over a period of 18-months to fix his lips that were left deformed and diseased from collagen implants. Over on BBC, series 'Say No to the Knife' is the first anti-cosmetic surgery show aiming to persuade young men and women already committed to the idea of going under the knife that there is a real alternative. Psychologist Rachel Morris and stylist Linzi Boyd hope to transform minds, looks and lives without the aid of invasive surgery. Cosmetic surgery is so 'de rigueur' it's almost inescapable. Just one mention of cosmetic surgery and everyone has an opinion – right, wrong, daft, see a shrink not a surgeon, bigger boobs

won't solve deep-seated feelings of inadequacy... (neither will drinking 14 pints solve a relationship break-up, not that it stops some people). Ask these same opinionated people if it's ok to have laser eye surgery in order to scrap the specs or have your teeth whitened for a Hollywood smile, and you may meet a mocking facial expression accompanied by a "that's different". Is it? By definition 'cosmetic' surgery is for 'aesthetic' rather than 'useful' purposes. Gleaming white teeth do not chew fillet steak any better than their less aesthetically appealing, slightly stained counterparts. On the other hand, if eight of your gnashers got knocked out with a hockey stick, it would probably be rather 'useful' to have them replaced.

It's all a matter of personal freedom to choose. If, despite the risks, you want to inhale the contents of 40 Marlboros a day, go base-jumping off the nearest radio antenna or keep up with members of the local rugby club on a 20-venue bar crawl, do so, it's your choice. Likewise, if you think that it's worth the cost of a second hand car to have a few litres of fat cells syringed out of your tummy – go for it. The cost (in pennies and pain) of a few years of pouring yourself into lycra and sweating it out on the step machine at the local health club could even make the 'quick fix' surgery option all the more appealing.

The hot potato in the cosmetic surgery debate is without doubt going on 'holiday' and returning with a bag of duty free and a new nose, definitely a double-edged scalpel. Official Department of Health guidelines, whilst acknowledging that cosmetic surgery abroad often costs less than in the UK, warn that the surgery could "end up more expensive in terms of risk, revision surgery and pain". Leading health insurance provider, BUPA, echoes these sentiments and does not offer a product which covers cosmetic surgery abroad. A BUPA spokesperson offered the following statement, "We would advise that patients consider carefully before going abroad for treatment as there are issues around continuity of care and how your recovery is monitored. You also may not be fit to travel long distances after a major operation and if there are any complications following the surgery they may not be covered in the price at a hospital abroad. You may not be able to meet the consultant before the procedure and you could have communication problems in a non-English speaking country."

Louise Truelove, age 41, Patient Coordinator, and patient, believes that whether you opt for surgery in Spain, South Africa or Serbia, the would-be patient should perform the same basic information gathering exercise. Louise comments, "First and foremost make sure that you are considering surgery for you and

not for anyone else. Forget peer pressure, the nagging husband, it's your body not theirs. Then you need to find a reputable surgeon registered with the GMC (General Medical Council). We can all put a whole bunch of impressive sounding letters and qualifications after our names, GMC is the one that counts. Once you've found that surgeon, he or she should be the same one that conducts the initial consultation as does the operation as does the follow-up consultations. Make sure you feel comfortable with them, if you wouldn't let them operate on your dog, don't let them operate on you. If you do decide to travel abroad follow these golden rules – give yourself at least a week between the initial consultation and the surgery to allow yourself time to digest the information and raise any concerns. Check that for major surgery such as a facelift, breast enlargement or tummy tuck, that you will be under general anaesthetic, kept in overnight for observation and be allowed to recuperate for at least seven days before jumping on the plane home. The conveyor-belt process of a local anaesthetic, quick op and off you go can literally cost you your health. And finally, check about follow-up and revision surgery, it should be included in the initial price."

If cosmetic surgery makes the patient feel 'normal', frees them from years of ridicule (real or imagined) and low self-esteem, you have to acknowledge its value. Protruding ears, a large crooked nose, i.e. an 'abnormality' that is painfully obvious to all who look, rather than just a minor imperfection only seen by the individual in the mirror, may well be better improved than ignored. The fact of the matter is that society can be cruel. Whilst organisations such as Changing Faces, the UK charity supporting and representing people with disfigurements, either born-with or from incidents such as burns or disease, are trying their damndest to eradicate the viewpoint that a disfigurement is undesirable, unfortunately everybody does not readily accept everyone.

No, cosmetic surgery might not change your life, help you find the partner of your dreams, shove you to the top of the career ladder or knock 20 years off your appearance, but it might just load the dice a bit further in your favour....

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