

PLASTIC SURGERY: WHAT IS IT AND HOW DID WE GET HERE?

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As a surgical specialty, Plastic Surgery may be one of the oldest. Documentation exists for the use of surgical means to correct facial injuries dating back more than 4,000 years in the Egyptian papyrus, and physicians in India were utilizing skin grafts for reconstructive work as early as 800 B.C. Many of these early techniques were developed to address battle injuries sustained by the soldiers of the day. Indeed, the more modern history of plastic surgery is closely tied to war. It was World War I that brought plastic surgery to the forefront within the medical community. The advent of modern weaponry brought with it extensive facial and head injuries the likes of which had never been seen before. These injuries required aggressive new innovations in reconstructive surgery. These techniques were further refined during World War II. It was during the course of these aggressive reconstructive procedures that surgeons began to realize the influence that one's appearance could have on the degree of success a person may have in their life. This realization perhaps laid the groundwork for purely cosmetic plastic surgery.

By the 1950's, plastic surgery was recognized as a separate specialty with a board certification in place. During the 1960's and 1970's, the more contemporary image of the plastic surgeon began to develop with more emphasis on cosmetic procedures. Purely cosmetic procedures have become progressively more accepted by the public, particularly as the "baby boomer" population ages. Plastic surgery can still be roughly divided into reconstructive and cosmetic categories. While there are plastic surgeons that do only cosmetic surgery, most are also involved with reconstructive procedures.

Reconstructive plastic surgery includes trauma reconstruction, cleft lip and palate repair, cancer reconstruction, and hand surgery. Subspecialties have also developed within the specialty. Craniofacial surgeons deal with cleft lip and palate reconstruction, as well as other more complex congenital deformities of the head and neck. Micro surgeons specialize in the transfer of tissue from one area of the body to another by reconnection of microscopic blood vessels and nerves. In all cases, reconstructive surgery is

dedicated to restoring normal function and appearance as much as is possible.

Cosmetic surgery is an ever-broadening specialty directed at improving appearance. Breast augmentation is perhaps the procedure most associated with cosmetic surgery with the first silicone breast implants being placed in 1962. Liposuction has also become a staple of cosmetic surgery over the past 25 years. The more recent emphasis has been on non-surgical techniques such as botox, injectable fillers, or laser treatments and minimally invasive surgical procedures with the goal being maximum improvement in appearance with minimal recovery time.

Whether you require reconstructive surgery or are interested in cosmetic improvement, pick your plastic surgeon carefully. Be sure that your surgeon is certified by The American Board of Plastic Surgery and preferably a member of The American Society of Plastic Surgeons. These qualifications will assure you that he has been specifically trained to perform both reconstructive and cosmetic procedures. Additionally, find a surgeon with whom you can communicate and who will take the time to understand your goals. A little research and visits to more than one plastic surgeon may result in a much more satisfying plastic surgery experience. And remember, some plastic surgeons may have particular expertise in your area of need. Check his or her website or check with your primary care physician to help match you with the appropriate surgeon.

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