



striking a beautiful balance

plastic surgery in the merrimack valley

by **Beth Daigle**

The subject of plastic surgery evokes varied emotions depending on the person you ask. A woman who has undergone reconstructive plastic surgery after a mastectomy will tell you it's a godsend. Another, more apprehensive individual may not be so sure.

Knowledge is power when considering the pros and cons of plastic surgery; in particular, cosmetic procedures. And make no mistake, television and Internet chat rooms are not the best sources of information.

Sitting down with an experienced plastic surgeon, preferably one who was recommended by someone you trust, is the first step in understanding the options, as well as the benefits and risks.

Advances in plastic surgery have lowered costs and made cosmetic procedures more attainable for more people. However, as any qualified surgeon will tell you, a patient must be in the correct frame of mind to be considered for treatment. It must be a personal choice, and not for the benefit of someone else.

Common motivators in the pursuit of plastic surgery in this part of the country are modest compared with other parts of the U.S. (According to the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery's 2011 statistics, only 6.3 percent of the nation's plastic surgery practices are located in New England, compared to 13.9 percent in the three West Coast states and 12.8 percent in the upper Midwest including Illinois, Michigan, Ohio and Wisconsin.) Whether it's a longstanding dislike of a particular facial feature or the desire to regain a more youthful appearance, patients in New England do not seem to harbor a "more is better" mentality.

Dr. Michele Sasmor of RiverSong Plastic Surgery in Newburyport reports breast reductions as her most commonly requested procedure. Liposuction, abdominoplasty (tummy tuck) and breast augmentation follow.

Though women are the top seekers of plastic surgery, men are turning to it in greater numbers. According to Dr. Stephen Scully of A Center for Aesthetic Surgery in North Andover, men now represent as much as 20 percent of the cosmetic surgery population, up from only 5

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percent 10 to 15 years ago.

Scully and Sasmor note professional relevance as a growing motivator for men and women.

“Men are coming around to the idea that it is OK to want to look better,” Sasmor says. “Men and women in their 50s, 60s and even 70s are still working, and want to work. They are competing against 20- and 30-year-olds, and now realize that they have to look the part.”

Reduction of excess skin after a dramatic weight loss is another common request from male clients. “They’ve lost weight, they feel better and now they want to look better,” Sasmor says.

Setting realistic expectations and recognizing when a patient is contemplating plastic surgery for the wrong reasons are important responsibilities for any upstanding surgeon. Reference to a spouse or significant other encouraging surgery is an immediate red flag, says Scully. Caution is also taken when a desire for extreme upsizing or downsizing is requested. Oversize breasts and lips or overly aggressive liposuction are not common practice in our area.

“The trick is to do these procedures where we change the patient’s appearance to make them look good and comfortable with themselves,” Scully says. “Their appearance is altered, although not in a stark way.”

Rhinoplasty (nose surgery) is among Scully’s most common procedures, along with breast and eyelid surgeries. Scully considers both form and function when operating — balancing what will look best physically with what the patient is striving for conceptually, he says.

Questions about costs are common. Hospital, surgical and anesthesia fees will comprise the total bill, and in the case of breast


augmentation, an implant fee applies. Some practices may charge a consultation fee of around \$150, which is later deducted off the price of surgery. Complications or additional contouring that might be needed during the procedure may add to the bottom line.

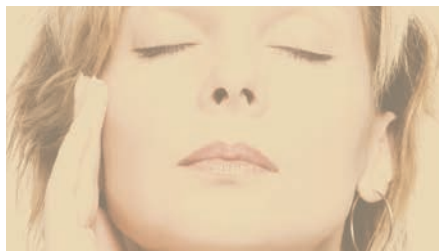
Cost for breast augmentation, among the popular procedures, can range from \$5,000 to \$7,000; rhinoplasty is typically between \$4,000 and \$6,000. Liposuction can cost \$2,500 and up, depending on the area being treated and the degree of contouring required, according to Sasmor.

Sasmor adds that the best candidates for plastic surgery will be in optimal health and be nonsmokers. Quality aftercare is another important element of plastic surgery, she says. In most cases, one to two weeks out of work can be expected, with additional healing time for more strenuous activities.

Dr. Patrick Marasco Jr. of the Plastic Surgery Center in North Andover takes aftercare very seriously. He tries to get his patients to extend his typical post-surgery program into more of a wellness regimen that would include yoga, massage, spa treatments and holistic medicine. Marasco is also exploring the idea of “tele-medicine,” which would allow patients to stay in contact with him during recovery via cellphone or video conferencing.

“This is very new, but I think that it gives patients more security, especially if they are alone or if they don’t have a companion who is comfortable with medical issues,” Marasco says. “We are looking at technology to fill in at home in a cost effective way.”

Average procedure costs, articles, news and resources for cosmetic and reconstructive surgical procedures can be found at the American Society of Plastic Surgeons website, PlasticSurgery.org. 



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