

## **Realistic Expectations, Emotional Balance are Key to Successful Cosmetic Surgery Outcome**

By David J. Levens, MD, PA, FACS

Individuals who hope a facelift or a nose reshaping or a breast augmentation will help them find a mate, prevent a divorce, cure depression or snag the perfect job are not good candidates for cosmetic surgery.

The truth is that cosmetic surgery can improve a person's looks, significantly increase self esteem and even produce a more optimistic attitude. It can make clothes fit more comfortably and attractively. It can make eye-makeup easier to apply. It can improve profiles and make it much more fun to look in the mirror.

But it can't change the basic realities of life. Obvious? Yes. But even the most sophisticated among us can be tempted to reach for quick fixes to life's challenges. Further, many people find it difficult to say no when a spouse or significant other is pressing them to have a cosmetic surgery enhancement they may not really want. That's why it is essential for the initial consultation between patient and plastic surgeon to include a straightforward discussion of the patient's goals, motivations and expectations. After all, despite all the media hype about cosmetic surgery, the plastic surgeon should function, first and foremost, as physician and patient advocate, whose job it is to help patients make wise medical decisions.

Indeed, in the case of spousal pressure (which occasionally borders on emotional abuse), surgeons are trained to help defuse the situation; they are required to take a course in domestic violence every two years. When a plastic surgeon suspects a patient is being coerced, he or she is obliged to take a stand on behalf of the patient.

Even patients who definitely want to have cosmetic surgery sometimes have difficulty articulating their motivations and goals. This is particularly true for young patients and is one of the primary reasons most surgeons set minimum age limits for procedures such as nose reshaping (typically 16) and breast augmentation (typically 18-19 and for silicone implants, 22, an age minimum set by the FDA.) Peer pressure and adolescent insecurities are detrimental to sound decision-making. This doesn't just apply to teenage girls. Indeed some studies show young men (late teens to early 20s) tend to be more vain than their female counterparts though they hate to admit it, and also have less realistic expectations of what cosmetic surgery can achieve. (continued)

During an initial cosmetic surgery consultation, the patient is asked to provide a complete medical history and list current medications. It is important to include any medications being taken for anxiety or depression. Certainly these conditions do not disqualify an individual as a surgical candidate, but they are a helpful flag to the surgeon to probe fears the patient may have about the procedure or recovery process. Surgery of any kind can cause anxiety even in people who are typically very calm. As well, many patients go through a very brief minor "depression" early after surgery as they ask themselves why? The more prepared a patient is before surgery, the most comfortable the entire process will be.

For mature adults with no physical or emotional issues that might impact their surgical experience, the initial discussion provides an invaluable opportunity for doctor and patient to explore what is possible, probable and aesthetically desirable. For example, if a patient says she wants a facelift which will dramatically change/improve her appearance, the surgeon can explain that extreme change can create an artificial look which can actually make a person appear strange, not younger.

The same is true for other surgeries, such as nasal reshaping. Years ago, patients "chose" a shape from a page of similar, often upturned, noses. The result was often a nose that appeared "done" and may have been out of balance with other facial features. Today, the goal is to approach each nose individually, and to improve problem areas, such as bumps, curves, excessive length or breadth, while keeping the nose in balance with the overall character of the face. After all, cosmetic surgery is all about improving on the normal, as opposed to reconstructive surgery which is about restoring to normal. The desired result should be a natural and more pleasing "you", not an "extreme makeover".

#

**David J. Levens, MD, PA, FACS** is a Columbia University Medical School graduate, a Board-certified plastic surgeon, and former Chief of Surgery at Coral Springs Medical Center. In practice in Coral Springs since 1989, he can be reached at 954-752-1020 or [www.DrLevens.com](http://www.DrLevens.com).