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Vanity, thy name is...Dad?

By David J. Levens, MD, PA, FACS

No question about it, men are having more cosmetic surgery procedures and treatments than ever before. However, unlike their female counterparts, they may not admit as easily to vanity as a motivating factor. Rather, men and women alike desire to make changes to their appearance that will enhance their own self-image and, very often, make them feel more competitive in a business environment where age discrimination is all too common.

9% of all cosmetic procedures in the U.S. during 2007 were performed on men. The number of surgical and nonsurgical procedures performed on men was just over 1 million, an increase of 17% from the previous year. Surgical procedures increased 5%; nonsurgical procedures increased 21%.

Men tend to prefer quick ways to boost their looks—procedures that don't require much down time away from work for recovery. That's one of the reasons nonsurgical procedures for men have increased by 886% in the past decade. Last year, the most popular nonsurgical procedures for men were Botox® injection, laser hair removal, microdermabrasion, Hyaluronic Acid (Juvederm, Restylane) and IPL laser treatment.

That's not to say that men resist surgical procedures if they feel strongly that change is necessary. Last year's most popular surgical procedure for men was liposuction, followed by eyelid surgery, nose reshaping, breast reduction and hair transplantation.

Typical return-to-work times for these procedures are: Liposuction, 2-3 days; eyelid surgery, 7-14 days; nose reshaping, 7-14 days; breast reduction, 7 days unless the work is very strenuous; hair transplantation requires multiple sessions over 1-2 years but return to work is usually a few days after each session.

Though not at the top of the list for men, facelifts and tummy tucks are also becoming more common for men, especially for working men who feel that sagging face and neck skin is prematurely aging them and for men who have excess abdominal skin due to significant weight loss.

In the case of nose, chin and ear reshaping, many male patients say corrective surgery is something they have wanted to do since their teens but lacked the time, money and "social permission" to have plastic surgery. Over the past decade, society has become far more approving of male plastic surgery, producing increases in all these areas.

One of the reasons male breast reduction is so popular is that the condition often results in embarrassment, teasing, and social trauma, especially for teens and younger men, leading many to wear heavy, loose-fitting shirts and avoid sports.

Sufferers may find some comfort in the fact that they are not alone. Gynecomastia is present in an estimated 40 to 60 percent of the male population. It may affect only one breast or both. Certain drugs (anabolic steroids, medications containing estrogen, alcohol and marijuana), may cause or contribute to enlarged male breasts. Other rare causes are medical conditions including cancer and impaired liver function. However in the vast majority of cases, there is no known cause for the gynecomastia (idiopathic).

Excess fat and/or glandular tissue create a "female" contour. Diet and exercise may help somewhat with generalized fat, but gynecomastia often persists despite achieving a normal weight because neither diet nor exercise will help reduce excess glandular tissue. Breast reduction surgery is appropriate for men of any age who are otherwise healthy. For teens, surgery should await at least 2-3 years of persistent findings through puberty, during which time there can be normal physiologic breast growth that often resolves spontaneously.

For men who want to improve their looks (or preserve their youthful looks) but just aren't ready for any type of cosmetic surgery or treatment, here are some suggestions:

- . Use UVA/UVB sun protection every day.
- . Don't smoke.
- . Shaving takes off the outermost skin layers, promoting cell turnover and keeping the skin looking young and healthy. Similar aged men tend to have younger looking skin than their women peers, in part due to shaving.
- . Wash the face with a non-soap cleanser, and keep the sun exposure to a minimum.

Happy Father's Day!

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