

Asking the following questions before having a cosmetic procedure can help patients find a qualified practitioner and avoid complications:

1 How many times has the specialist performed the procedure?

Don't be afraid to ask this question. The procedure should be one that the doctor performs regularly. When physicians have specialized training in performing a procedure and have successfully performed the procedure on numerous patients, they usually want others to know.

2 What results can I expect?

While results depend largely on the skill and experience of the person performing the procedure, the condition of the patient's skin as well as the patient's age and health affect the cosmetic outcome. A dermatologist typically tells a patient what to expect after visually examining the skin and gathering a medical history. He/she also can tell the patient if the procedure will deliver the desired results and if it is appropriate for the patient.

Tip: To help communicate the results you seek, find pictures to show what you want to look like. For example, if you want fuller, more youthful lips, find a photograph of the lips you desire. Photographs greatly help communicate expectations and break down communication barriers.

3 May I see "before" and "after" photographs of patients or speak with patients whom the doctor has treated with this procedure(s)?

Doctors should be willing to share their results through photographs or referrals. If a physician is hesitant to do so, find one who will.

4 What is the recovery time?

While cosmetic procedures have become less invasive and require less downtime, patients should know what to expect after the procedure. For example, after botulinum rejuvenation (an injectable that temporarily diminishes fine lines and wrinkles) patients can have temporary swelling, redness or bruising.

5 What are the risks and side effects of the procedure?

While the risks involved in most cosmetic procedures are minimal, there are risks. Potential complications should be discussed before the cosmetic procedure is scheduled.

6 How long will the results last?

Most cosmetic results are not permanent. While a patient's lifestyle and overall health can shorten the length of time that a patient sees the results, there are general guidelines.

7 What is the cost of the treatment?

Insurance usually does not cover the cost of a cosmetic procedure. Before scheduling the procedure, find out the costs and how payment will be required.

References:

American Academy of Dermatology, "Consumer Alert: Questions to Ask for Safe and Successful Cosmetic Surgery." News Release issued July 25, 2007. Last accessed February 25, 2008.

American Academy of Dermatology, "Position Statement on the Use of Non-Physician Office Personnel." Last amended by the Board of Directors on July 23, 2005. Last accessed February 28, 2008.

American Society for Dermatologic Surgery, Patient Safety Campaign: Highlights. Last accessed February 25, 2008.