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What You Must Do Before Booking a Plastic Surgery Procedure

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Top advice for making your first cosmetic enhancement treatment a success.

Whether you're preparing for your first-ever procedure, a revision or an additional treatment, there is much to consider. Not sure which factors should take priority? Four board-certified doctors and surgeons guide you to making the best decision for your needs.

1. Determine your aesthetic goal(s)

When you're considering having work done, the professionals agree that your main responsibility is to identify what needs to change, not how it will change. "We listen to what a patient wants to achieve and then apply our medical and surgical knowledge to guide the patient through their options," explains Dr. Andres Gantous, MD, FRCSC, FACS, an otolaryngologist-head and neck surgeon specializing in facial plastic and reconstructive surgery at Toronto Facial Plastic Surgery.

A doctor can demonstrate what can be achieved by showing photos, allowing patients to try sizers on over their breasts (for augmentation procedures), manipulating an area to mimic a lift or tightening procedure and other methods. "There are computer software programs, where the teeth in a photograph can be modified and then presented to the patient," explains Dr. Brian S. Friedman, DDS, a general and Cosmetic Dentist in Toronto. "A composite resin mock-up that can be worn on the teeth is also very effective in communicating the changes that can be made to a smile."

2. Communicate your goals CLEARLY

Determine what achieving your aesthetic goal will mean to you. "It's also important for us to determine what is the concern you have and try to find out how that impacts your life," says Dr. Robert Sleightholm, MD, FRCSC, a plastic surgeon practising in cosmetic surgery at Brampton Cosmetic Surgery Center & Medical Spa (<https://www.bramptoncosmetic.com/>).

Fully explain your goal with detailed descriptions (speak about size, shape, colour, how the area feels, etc.), instead of using generic terms, such as "refreshed," "nicer" or "more attractive." This helps a professional create a procedure plan specific to your needs. "Many patients will think that they need a face lift when all that's required is a bit of plumping of tissues, which can be achieved with fillers or fat transfers, instead," says Dr. Gantous.

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Whether your need for a change is due to an accident, aging or another reason, providing a visual reference for your goal helps. "Bring in a photo of yourself before the noticeable changes have occurred," advises Dr. Friedman.

"Patients can also do some research on possible procedures online," says Dr. Jerome Edelstein, MD, FRCSC, a plastic surgeon at Edelstein Cosmetic Plastic Surgery in Toronto. "They can learn a lot about what's available to treat what bothers them, and they can view before and after images to get a better idea if those images convey the results they want."

3. Have realistic expectations

"Sometimes the patient's expectations may be higher than what the procedure can actually accomplish," says Dr. Sleightholm. "Part of that may be even related to the Internet because there are so many websites where there seems to be perfect results for every person shown." Although photos can be useful for determining results, it is hard for a layperson to discern the number of procedures performed on that patient, if you share the same physical and medical characteristics as the patient in the photo, and if any post-procedure work to reduce scarring was done on that patient. A professional will guide you through what's possible and what is far from reasonable.

"Our job is to know what patients think they want and to let them know what actually can be achieved with a certain procedure," says Dr. Gantous. "My goal is to make a person happy, and if I don't think I can do that because what they're asking for isn't realistic, I'll be straightforward and tell them," explains Dr. Edelstein, who claims it happens about 10 per cent of the time. "They'll either listen or keep on searching for a surgeon who'll say OK."

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