



BARIATRIC PLASTIC SURGERY



A Guide to
Cosmetic Surgery
after Weight Loss

THOMAS B. MCNEMAR, M.D. • JOHN LOMONACO, M.D. • MITCHEL D. KRIEGER, M.D.

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To my wife, Cindy, and my children, Mackenzie and Kelsey. May you always follow your dreams.

—Thomas B. McNemar, M.D., F.A.C.S.

To my family for their understanding and support, especially during my long absences. To my father John LoMonaco Sr., whose indomitable spirit exemplifies perseverance and drive.

—John LoMonaco, M.D., F.A.C.S.

To my wife, Colleen, for your love, support, and understanding. To my father, Jerry Krieger, for your love and for the example you have set for me. You have provided me a moral compass with which to guide my life. To the memory of my mother, Barbara Krieger, who ignited my love for medicine, and whose courage and tenacity remain an inspiration to me.

—Mitchel D. Krieger, M.D., F.A.C.S.

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John LoMonaco, M.D., F.A.C.S.

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Mitchel D. Krieger, M.D., F.A.C.S.

Introduction

Congratulations! You've succeeded in losing a great **I** deal of weight. This is no easy task, and you should be proud of your achievement. Whether you've lost weight thanks to a bariatric procedure or you've done it the old-fashioned way with diet and exercise, it takes a strong commitment and a healthy dose of willpower. By shedding those extra pounds, you've probably noted countless changes for the better in your health and in your daily life. For instance, you may have experienced improvements in your blood pressure or with diabetes, two health problems commonly associated with being overweight. You also may have significantly increased your physical stamina and your ability to enjoy an active life. Now that you've reached or are nearing your weight goal, you deserve to feel good about yourself and your new shape.

Unfortunately, losing large amounts of weight can sometimes create other troublesome body issues. In particular, loose and excess skin may prevent you from fully enjoying the results of your weight loss efforts. Excess skin that hangs from your body can cause skin irritations and rashes. In addition, loose, hanging skin can keep you from seeing your body's true new size and can force you to continue wearing larger sizes of clothing. A visible reminder of the weight you used to carry, excess skin may even leave you feeling a bit blue.

Take heart that you are not alone. Excess skin affects many men and women who have lost large amounts of weight. The good news is that there are a number of plastic surgery procedures that address the problem of loose skin after weight loss. In fact, the demand for such procedures has grown dramatically in the past few years. And plastic surgeons have

answered the call with refinements in techniques and innovative procedures that can help you achieve a more pleasing shape.

This book is designed to help you understand the various procedures available and to answer some of your questions about what to expect from plastic surgery after weight loss. From choosing a surgeon to recovering from surgery at home, *Bariatric Plastic Surgery: A Guide to Cosmetic Surgery after Weight Loss* will help guide you on your journey to an improved body shape, better health, and an enhanced quality of life.

Contemplating Bariatric Plastic Surgery

If you've spent years battling excess fat, you should feel very proud of yourself for losing a large amount of weight. But shedding all those pounds may not have given you the body contours you desire. In fact, your massive weight loss may have caused a new problem you hadn't anticipated, namely, excess skin that hangs in folds on your body. This sagging skin may be preventing you from seeing your slimmer new shape and may actually make you feel disappointed with your new look. You may feel that the loose skin is an unpleasant reminder of your former self or that you still feel overweight when you look in the mirror.

Loose skin also may be causing hygiene and health problems and may be making it hard for you to find clothing that fits. And unfortunately, no amount of dieting or exercise is going to eliminate all that extra skin or make it shrink to fit your new shape. Plastic surgery can add an important psychological benefit to the health benefits you have already received from your weight loss.

Considering all the effort you put into losing weight, all this loose skin can be extremely frustrating. Fortunately, there are several cosmetic surgery procedures that can remove excess skin and give you the sleeker body you've worked so hard to achieve.

What Is Bariatric Plastic Surgery after Weight Loss?

Plastic surgery after weight loss is designed to enhance the shape of your body. It aims to improve the proportions of your figure and to improve

your skin tone by removing the loose, sagging skin that often follows massive weight loss. Some of these surgical procedures also tighten underlying tissues or remove fat deposits to produce a more aesthetically pleasing shape. Cosmetic surgery can address the problem of loose skin on nearly every part of your body as well as on your face and neck.

Types of Bariatric Plastic Surgery

Several different surgical procedures are available to improve your body contours. Commonly performed procedures are designed to target sagging skin on the abdomen, thighs, buttocks, breasts, chest, back, arms, face, and neck. Following is a list of plastic surgery procedures that can be performed following weight loss to give you a more pleasing shape.

- *Tummy Tuck*: Also called *abdominoplasty*, a tummy tuck is a surgical procedure that resculpts the shape of your abdomen. It can give you a smoother, flatter-looking belly and a more well-defined waistline. The procedure removes excess skin from the abdomen, and it also can tighten underlying tissues and remove stubborn fat that hasn't responded to your weight loss efforts. The belly button also is reconstructed, and rejuvenation of the pubic area is frequently performed.
- *Panniculectomy*: This surgical procedure is designed specifically to remove a *panniculus*—also referred to as a *pannus*—a large apron of skin and fat that hangs from the abdomen and is a fairly common occurrence following massive weight loss. The goal of a panniculectomy often is to remove massive amounts of skin and fat that may be causing infection or serious limitations in your activity. A panniculectomy typically does not have the same aesthetic outcome as a tummy tuck but can still help redefine the shape of your abdomen.
- *Thigh Lift*: Also called *thighplasty*, a thigh lift can eliminate drooping skin from the inner and/or outer thighs to give you more shapely legs.

By tightening the remaining skin, thigh lift surgery may rid you of unsightly saddlebags and, in some cases, also may reduce the appearance of cellulite.

- *Buttocks Lift*: This surgical procedure improves the shape of your posterior by getting rid of sagging skin and restoring skin tone.
- *Pubic Lift*: A pubic lift, also called *monsplasty*, can alleviate the severe sagging and bulky tissue buildup in the pubic area that sometimes accompanies massive weight loss.
- *Body Lift*: Also referred to as a *lower body lift*, *belt lipectomy*, *central body lift*, or *circumferential torsoplasty*, a body lift improves the contours of the abdomen, thighs, and buttocks. This surgical procedure typically combines a tummy tuck, pubic lift (*monsplasty*), thigh lift, and buttocks lift into a single operation.
- *Breast Lift*: With a breast lift, also called *mastopexy*, droopy breasts are restored to a more pleasing and youthful shape. With breast lift surgery, excess skin is removed, and the remaining, tightened skin provides better support to the breast tissue. In some cases, breast implants may be used to help fill out the shape of breasts that have deflated after weight loss. This is called a *breast lift with augmentation*.
- *Breast Reduction*: With breast reduction surgery, breasts that are too large following weight loss can be reduced to a size that is in better proportion with the new contours of your body.



The apron of loose skin hanging from the abdomen is called a panniculus. This patient underwent a panniculectomy, a procedure performed to remove the panniculus for both cosmetic and functional purposes.

- *Male Breast Reduction*: This surgical procedure aims to restore a more natural shape to the male chest by eliminating the breast enlargement that can result from being overweight.
- *Arm Lift*: Also called *brachioplasty*, an arm lift is a surgical procedure that can eliminate skin that hangs down from the back of your arms.
- *Upper Body Lift*: This surgical procedure is designed to improve the contours of the breasts (or the male chest), upper back, and arms. An upper body lift typically combines a number of procedures into the same operation.
- *Facelift*: With a facelift, also called *rhytidectomy*, you can achieve a more youthful, rested look. A facelift tightens the jowls as well as the underlying muscles to enhance your appearance.
- *Neck Lift*: Often performed at the same time as a facelift, a neck lift, also called *cervicoplasty*, provides greater definition to the jawline and neck by removing loose skin.
- *Liposuction*: One of the most popular of all cosmetic surgical procedures, liposuction is used to permanently remove fat from a variety of areas of the body. It is commonly used in conjunction with other bariatric plastic surgery procedures to help you achieve the sleeker contours you want.

Growing Popularity of Plastic Surgery after Weight Loss

The popularity of plastic surgery after weight loss is escalating rapidly. This rise is directly related to the increase in the number of Americans who are undergoing some form of bariatric surgery to accelerate weight loss. Bariatric surgery involves a number of procedures performed on the

stomach and/or intestines either to restrict food intake or to alter the way food is processed and absorbed. The typical result is rapid weight loss.

Currently, each year, more than 200,000 Americans have some form of bariatric surgery to accelerate weight loss. And that number is climbing quickly. With the rapid weight loss experienced following bariatric surgery, sagging skin is an unfortunate by-product. That's why more than 55,000 men and women who have undergone bariatric surgery seek out some form of cosmetic surgery following weight loss.

Of course, having bariatric surgery isn't the only way to lose large amounts of weight, and it isn't the only reason that cosmetic surgery following weight loss is surging in popularity. If you shed pounds the old-fashioned way with diet and exercise, you can still be saddled with excess flesh, which can motivate you to seek a surgical solution. Rest assured that the plastic surgery procedures covered in this book are designed to improve your body contours regardless of how you lost weight.

Are You a Candidate for Bariatric Plastic Surgery?

If you've dropped a significant amount of weight and are now bothered by drooping skin, you may be a candidate for plastic surgery. The various procedures available can be tailored for women or men and are usually highly individualized to meet your specific needs. Provided you're in good overall health, dramatic improvements can be achieved whether you're in your twenties or in your golden years.

Plastic surgeons will look at several factors to determine if you are a good candidate for surgery. These factors include your weight, your overall health, your age, your expectations, and your attitude.

Your Weight

One of the key factors surgeons look at when deciding if you would make a good candidate for post-weight loss plastic surgery is your weight.

More important than the actual number, however, is how long your weight has been stable. Stable means that your weight fluctuates no more than a few pounds. Most physicians recommend waiting to have surgery until your weight has been stable for approximately three to six months or more. With a stable weight, you are more likely to achieve the best results from surgery.

Some surgeons also take your body mass index (BMI) into consideration. Your BMI is the ratio between your weight and your height and is a good indicator of whether you are normal, overweight, obese, or morbidly obese. A BMI of 18 to 24 is associated with normal weight, 25 to 29 indicates you are overweight, 30 to 39 puts you in the obese category, and 40 or more suggests morbid obesity.

In general, the lower your BMI, the better your results will be. Ideally, your BMI should be below 30 in order to ensure the best possible outcome. You may still be considered a candidate for surgery if your BMI is in the 30 to 35 range or even slightly higher. In this range, however, you should be aware that the risk for complications increases and that the results typically aren't as satisfactory.

Your Overall Health

Your overall health is one of the most important things plastic surgeons take into consideration when determining if you're a candidate for surgery. Fortunately, your health may have improved significantly since losing weight. In many cases, shedding pounds can lessen or completely alleviate many medical conditions that are associated with obesity, such as type 2 diabetes, hypertension, sleep apnea, and heart disease.

Your Age

You don't have to fall within a specific age range to have plastic surgery following weight loss. However, if you are older, your overall health condition may be of more concern. Anyone over the age of forty may be

required to obtain medical clearance from your physician before surgery. Being sixty or beyond also may play a role in determining which procedures are most appropriate for you and whether or not you can have more than one procedure performed during the same operation.



Lower body lift with inner and outer thigh lift

Your Expectations

Having realistic expectations is one of the most important qualifications if you're considering plastic surgery after weight loss. Plastic surgeons stress that the key word you need to focus on is "improvement" rather than "perfection." This is true regardless of which post-weight loss procedure or procedures interest you the most. If you're willing to accept this fact, you'll be a better candidate for surgery. In addition, you'll have a much higher chance of being satisfied with your results.

You also need to anticipate a significant amount of scarring as a result of surgical procedures that remove excess skin. These scars may appear on several parts of your body depending on the procedures performed. It's important that you fully understand that these scars can be quite extensive. Fortunately, in many cases, the scars can be placed strategically so they will be hidden from view by your clothing or even by a bathing suit. If you're like most people who opt for plastic surgery, scars are a very acceptable trade-off for a better body contour.

Be aware, too, that the recovery period following plastic surgery after weight loss can be rather lengthy. In fact, it can take quite a bit longer to recover from post-weight loss surgery than it does to bounce back from bariatric surgery itself. Depending on the specific surgical procedures you have, you may be required to spend a day or two in the hospital, and your recovery may take several weeks or even more than a month. Because of this, you should be prepared to miss work for some period of time after having your procedure.

Your Attitude

Having a healthy attitude is another desirable factor in candidates for plastic surgery after weight loss. It's best if you're emotionally stable and have a positive attitude about yourself. Of course, living with unsightly, droopy skin can wreak havoc with your self-esteem and self-confidence. It's understandable that you might have some lingering negative feelings about the way your body looks. These feelings can often be alleviated once surgery removes that extra baggage. However, if you harbor negative feelings about yourself in general, your new look may not remedy these feelings.

A good attitude also means being willing to take an active role in the experience. This involves taking the time to learn about the various procedures that might be right for you, asking questions, communicating your goals clearly, and following instructions carefully. By being an active

participant in the surgery process, you greatly increase your chances of achieving optimal results.

Understanding the Limitations of Plastic Surgery after Weight Loss

Good candidates realize that even though plastic surgery procedures can reshape your body to give it more pleasing contours, there are physical limitations to what can be achieved. For instance, no amount of surgery can alter your basic bone structure. If your hip bones are wide or if your rib cage is asymmetrical, removing excess skin won't change that and may in fact make it more noticeable. Also, it's important to note that the more loose flesh you have, the harder it is to obtain optimal results.

Remember that these procedures are designed mainly to eliminate and tighten loose skin; they aren't considered a treatment for obesity, cellulite, or stretch marks. Yes, some fat can be removed along with your excess skin, but plastic surgery shouldn't be viewed as a weight loss method. Tightening the skin and removing fat deposits may reduce the appearance of cellulite in some cases but can't be expected to make it disappear. And only stretch marks that are located within the areas of skin to be removed will be eliminated.

When Bariatric Plastic Surgery Is Not Recommended

Having plastic surgery following massive weight loss isn't right for everybody. For example, if you suffer from certain medical conditions, plastic surgery may not be suitable for you. Health problems that may prevent you from being considered a good candidate for surgery include:

- Heart disease
- Lung disease
- Kidney disease
- Liver disease

- Uncontrolled diabetes
- Uncontrolled hypertension
- Bleeding disorders
- Connective-tissue diseases
- Endocrine diseases
- Autoimmune diseases

If you are still severely obese, you may not be considered a good candidate. In this case, a plastic surgeon may recommend that you postpone surgery until you are closer to your goal weight. Likewise, if you hope to continue losing weight, it may be best to wait until you've reached a weight you would like to maintain.

In general, smokers do not make good candidates for post-weight loss procedures. That's because nicotine—whether it's delivered via cigarettes, gum, the patch, or chewing tobacco—can diminish the body's ability to heal wounds after surgery. And because the incisions for these procedures are extensive, proper wound healing is critical to a successful outcome.

Having unrealistic expectations usually indicates that you aren't an ideal candidate for surgery. That's because even if you achieve the best possible results, you probably still won't be happy with your outcome.

Timing of Your Surgery: How Soon after Weight Loss?

Even though you may be eager to have cosmetic surgery to complement your weight loss and to complete your new look, it's best to wait for some time after shedding those extra pounds. Depending on your surgeon, you may be asked to delay surgery until you've stabilized your weight for three to six months or even longer.

If you've had some form of bariatric surgery, it usually takes approximately twelve to eighteen months before you are ready to be

evaluated for cosmetic procedures. However, some people lose weight more slowly than others, and it may take longer. For instance, some types of bariatric surgery, such as lap band surgery, produce a more gradual weight loss. In this case, it may take two to three years before you are ready for plastic surgery.

Having a stable weight is key for several reasons. If you are still in the process of losing weight rapidly, your *metabolism* may be altered. This may limit your body's ability to heal wounds following major surgery. In addition, it may lead to a depressed immune system, leaving you more vulnerable to infection. Usually, your body's immune system and wound healing capabilities return to full force once your weight has stabilized.

For instance, you may experience nausea and vomiting during the first few months after bariatric surgery. This can lead to an imbalance in your *electrolytes*, the minerals in blood that regulate the amount of fluid in your body. Low levels of electrolytes can put you at increased risk for complications as a result of anesthesia. With time, proper nutrition, and dietary counseling, your body will adjust to the changes in your digestive system, and you should be able to keep your electrolytes balanced.

In addition, it's important to give your skin a chance to contract naturally to your new shape. Even though many people who shed significant girth will not experience any tightening of the skin, some individuals will notice some degree of retraction. And typically, the less extra skin you have, the better the results you can achieve from surgery.

Multiple Procedures

If you have skin hanging from more than one area of your body, you'll probably need multiple procedures to reach your goals. For instance, if your skin is saggy on your abdomen, you may benefit from a tummy tuck, but this may not be enough to give you the look you desire. You also may benefit from a thigh lift, a buttocks lift, or some other procedure. In fact, it's

very common to need several procedures to achieve the best outcome. This can be accomplished either by combining procedures into a single operation or by staging procedures in a series of operations.

Combining Procedures

When multiple procedures are required, your plastic surgeon may recommend combining procedures into a single operation. For instance, your surgeon may suggest having a tummy tuck, thigh lift, and buttocks lift all on the same day, or an arm lift and a breast lift in one operation. Combining procedures offers several advantages. For example, by having multiple procedures performed at the same time, you reduce your exposure to anesthesia, and you face only one recovery period and one period of time off work. In addition, the results following surgery are likely to be far more dramatic.

However, combining procedures poses drawbacks, too. For instance, it may raise your risk for complications both during your procedure and after you return home to recover. In addition, it lengthens your recovery period and may make you more uncomfortable as you heal. The surgeon's choice of a well-equipped facility to manage the early phases of your recovery and to respond effectively to your needs is most important, especially when considering the more extensive combined procedures.

As you can imagine, any surgical procedure can cause some soreness and can reduce your ability to move around in the days following your operation. For example, if you have a thigh lift, postoperative soreness in your legs might make it difficult to walk around, to get out of bed, or to sit down. In this instance, you would probably rely more heavily on your arms to help you get up and down. But if you've had an arm lift in the same operation, you might not be able to do so, and your mobility would be further restricted. Since movement is one of the keys to a healthy recovery, an increased lack of mobility puts you more at risk for developing complications.

In addition, there are limits to the number of procedures that can safely be performed during a single operation. In general, most surgeons recommend limiting the amount of time you're in surgery to approximately six to eight hours. Beyond this limit, the risks associated with surgery and the exposure to anesthesia increase.

However, some physicians do perform a total body lift that combines a lower body lift and an upper body lift in the same operation. Typically, this type of procedure is performed with a team of two or three surgeons and takes about ten to twelve hours to complete. Although the total body lift can produce dramatic results, it also requires an extensive recovery period and increases the risk of complications both during and after the surgery. For these reasons, most plastic surgery specialists do not advocate having a total body lift.

Staging Procedures

To ensure your safety, your surgeon may recommend staging your procedures. This means that you will have a series of operations spaced out over a period of time. For many post-weight loss patients, it's common to have two or three operations to complete the process. Depending on how many areas of your body are affected by excess skin, you may need as many as five operations to achieve the results you want.

After each operation, your body needs ample time to heal before you can safely have another procedure. The exact length of time depends on how your individual recovery goes, but most surgeons recommend waiting approximately two to six months before having subsequent procedures. Therefore, it can take a year or two—or even more in some cases—to complete the process. When contemplating this time, remember that it likely took many years for your skin to reach the condition it is in, so be patient, and allow your surgeon several sessions to correct everything safely. The old saying “Rome wasn't built in a day” certainly applies here.

Staging procedures doesn't mean, however, that you are only having one single procedure with each operation. For example, you may have a combined tummy tuck, thigh lift, and buttocks lift in one operation and then a breast lift and an arm lift in a subsequent operation. Since every individual is unique, there is no blueprint for staging procedures. Depending on your body and your goals, your surgeon will determine the best and safest combination of procedures and staging of operations for you.

Your safety is the main benefit of staging procedures. In addition, the recovery period following staged procedures is likely to be quicker than if you have an all-in-one total body lift. Staging procedures also may lead to a better overall outcome because it allows your surgeon to fine-tune your results in the following operations. For instance, let's say you have a lower body lift for your first operation and an upper body lift for your second operation. During your second operation, your surgeon can make minor improvements to your abdomen, thighs, or buttocks if necessary.

The disadvantages of staging procedures are that you will be exposed to anesthesia with each operation, and you will have more than one recovery period. In spite of this, the vast majority of plastic surgeons recommend staging as the best and safest way to accomplish your goals.

What's the Next Step?

Only a plastic surgeon can determine if you are indeed a good candidate for surgery after weight loss and which procedures will best help you achieve your goals, so schedule an appointment for a consultation. Prior to your meeting, spend some time learning about the various procedures that interest you. Meet with other patients who have had the procedures, or read about their experiences. Your surgeon's office will likely have many of these important resources available for you. This way, you'll be prepared to ask questions about the surgery process and to communicate your goals effectively.

Choosing a Plastic Surgeon

One of the most important decisions you'll make regarding plastic surgery after weight loss is choosing your surgeon. Thousands of plastic surgeons nationwide perform the procedures that can help you achieve more flattering body contours, but how do you know which one is right for you? Knowing what to look for in terms of training and experience can help you narrow your choices. But those aren't the only qualifications that count. Finding a surgeon with whom you feel comfortable is also key. When you feel at ease with your surgeon, you are more likely to have good communication, which often increases your chances of having satisfactory results. Because your choice of surgeon is so critical to your overall outcome, you should be prepared to spend some quality time on this crucial step.

Finding a Plastic Surgeon

You have many options when it comes to finding a qualified plastic surgeon. A good first step is to ask your friends, family, and physicians for referrals. If you belong to a support group for weight loss patients, consider asking the members of your group for recommendations. Likewise, if you had bariatric surgery, check with the doctor who performed your procedure. Many bariatric specialists maintain professional relationships with local area plastic surgeons and routinely offer referrals. Once you have a list of names, visit each doctor's Web site. This can give you a better idea

about the surgeon's practice and experience with post-weight loss plastic surgery procedures.

You also can use the Internet to search for physicians. But be aware that not all plastic surgery Web sites are the same. Many sites are simply commercial for-profit ventures that will list any plastic surgeon for a fee without verifying qualifications, training, or experience. When searching for a plastic surgery specialist, you may want to confine your Internet search to reputable medical organizations, such as the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (www.plasticsurgery.org). This site offers a handy physician-finder tool to help you locate qualified surgeons in your area.



Choosing an experienced, board-certified plastic surgeon is the first step in ensuring good results with bariatric plastic surgery.

Surgeon Qualifications: What to Look For

Of course, you want to choose a surgeon who is highly qualified. But what exactly makes a surgeon qualified? In general, any surgeon you're considering should have the proper education and training, should be board certified, and should have experience performing bariatric plastic surgery procedures.

Education and Training

Several years of formal education and specialized training are required to become a plastic surgeon. The first step in the lengthy process is graduating from a four-year college or university, followed by the successful completion of an additional four years at medical school. The medical school should be *accredited*, which means that the institution meets standards set by a national authority for medical education programs.

After earning an M.D. degree from medical school, doctors who want to become plastic surgeons must complete several years of additional hands-on training. This training begins with at least five years of hospital training called a residency. During the residency, doctors perform surgery under the guidance of senior-level surgeons. The first few years of the residency typically cover general surgery procedures. The focus shifts to plastic surgery procedures during the last few years of the residency. Doctors take on increasing amounts of responsibility as their residency progresses. By the time they complete the residency, they've gained ample hands-on surgical experience and are able to assume responsibility for the complete care of patients.

After the residency is completed, many plastic surgeons choose to continue their training with a fellowship that concentrates on a specialized area of plastic surgery. However, training doesn't end there. In order to maintain certification, all plastic surgeons are required to take continuing medical education courses as long as they remain in practice. This provides assurance that doctors remain up-to-date on the latest advancements in plastic surgery techniques.

All surgeons who are members of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS) have undergone their training at accredited institutions. In addition, the ASPS requires documentation that each of its members has kept up with continuing medical education courses, including in the areas of ethics and patient safety.

Licensure

In order to practice medicine, all doctors must be licensed by the state in which their practice is located. A license to practice medicine is usually granted only to medical school graduates who have passed a comprehensive exam. A state license allows the physician to practice medicine only within that particular state. If a doctor moves to a new state or opens a satellite office in a neighboring state, he or she must acquire a new license for that state.

How can you find out if a plastic surgeon is licensed in your state? You can verify licensure with your state's medical board, where you also can investigate any complaints made or disciplinary actions taken against your surgeon. You can find a complete list of state medical boards with links to their individual Web sites on the Federation of State Medical Boards Web site (www.fsmb.org/directory_smb.html).

Board Certification: Why It's Important

You've probably heard that it's important to choose a plastic surgeon who is "board certified." But why is it so important, and what does that mean? Board certification indicates that in addition to fulfilling the educational and training requirements necessary to become a licensed physician, a doctor has made a voluntary commitment to lifelong learning within a specialized field of medicine, such as plastic surgery.

Board certification is offered in twenty-four specialties through the member boards of the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS). For instance, a doctor can earn board certification within the field of dermatology, obstetrics and gynecology, surgery, or plastic surgery, among others. Therefore, just because a doctor is board certified doesn't mean that he or she has expertise in plastic surgery. That's why it's critical to make sure that your doctor is board certified specifically in the field of plastic surgery. The American Board of Plastic Surgery (ABPS) is the only board authorized to offer certification in plastic surgery.

To become board certified, a plastic surgeon must have completed a residency program in both general surgery and plastic surgery and passed comprehensive written and oral exams. Board certification is granted only after a physician has passed the exams. To maintain certification, plastic surgeons must participate in a program of continuous professional development and must continually meet the moral and ethical standards set by the ABPS.

Board certification is a completely voluntary process. It is not required in order to perform plastic surgery. However, choosing a plastic surgeon who meets the stringent standards set by an independent board may give you additional peace of mind. You can verify that a plastic surgeon is board certified on the ABMS Web site (www.abms.org).

There are a few caveats about board certification. Be aware that some doctors claim to be “certified” by organizations other than the ABPS. However, these organizations don’t have the same rigorous requirements and therefore don’t provide you with the same assurance that a physician has expertise in plastic surgery. Also, it’s important to understand that many states permit any licensed physician to perform “cosmetic surgery” even if he or she is not a trained plastic surgeon. To ensure your safety, it’s best to limit your search to board-certified plastic surgeons.

Experience in Plastic Surgery after Weight Loss

In addition to board certification, you should seek out surgeons who have experience performing post-weight loss plastic surgery procedures. When you’ve experienced massive weight loss, you may have special issues or concerns that need to be addressed. Surgeons who routinely operate on weight loss patients have a better understanding of these needs and will achieve a better outcome. Fortunately, a growing number of physicians are adding post-weight loss procedures to their repertoire, and some are choosing to specialize in this type of surgery.

How much experience is necessary? You may have heard that you can gauge a surgeon's expertise by asking how often he or she performs the procedures that interest you. Unfortunately, there is no magic number that indicates adequate expertise. As a rule of thumb, look for a surgeon who regularly performs the procedures you are considering on a monthly basis.

A number of organizations exist that can help direct you to a plastic surgeon who is experienced in bariatric plastic surgery. ObesityHelp.com (www.obesityhelp.com) is a large online community of weight loss patients that keeps an extensive database of plastic surgeons dedicated to bariatric plastic surgery. The American Society of Bariatric Plastic Surgeons (www.asbps.org), which was established by plastic surgeons who specialize in body contouring surgery specifically for the needs of weight loss patients, also has a physician finder feature.

The Surgical Team

When your operation takes place, your surgeon will be accompanied by a surgical team that may include nurses, surgical assistants, and a person who administers anesthesia. To ensure your safety, you may want to inquire about the credentials of the person handling the anesthesia portion of your procedure. Anesthesia should only be administered by a board-certified physician anesthesiologist or by a certified registered nurse anesthetist. These professionals have completed specialized training that qualifies them to administer anesthesia and to monitor your well-being during your surgery.

The Surgical Center

Plastic surgery after weight loss can be performed in a variety of settings, including hospitals, outpatient surgery centers, and office-based surgical suites. Since most post-weight loss procedures are considered major surgery, they usually take place in hospitals or outpatient surgery centers.

These surgical settings typically offer more extensive recovery facilities than office-based suites.

No matter which surgical setting is used for your procedure, be sure to check that the facility is accredited, which means that it meets rigorous national standards for quality and safety. To become accredited, a surgery facility must meet requirements regarding surgeon credentials, personnel experience, equipment, and overall safety in the operating room.

Accreditation is offered by a number of organizations, including the American Association for the Accreditation of Ambulatory Surgery Facilities, the Accreditation Association for Ambulatory Health Care, the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Health Care Organizations, and Medicare. Depending on the state in which the facility is located, accreditation may be voluntary or mandatory. However, choosing an accredited facility that meets stringent safety requirements may add to your peace of mind.

Traveling Out of Town for Surgery

In some instances, you may want to consider choosing a plastic surgeon who isn't located in your area. Keep in mind that traveling out of town for surgery will require additional preparation. For instance, you'll need to find hotel accommodations for your initial recovery period so that you may be monitored closely. In many cases, surgeons who routinely work with out-of-town patients may have administrative staff who are trained to coordinate such plans and arrange appropriate accommodations for your recovery.

Remember that choosing a plastic surgeon who isn't local can present certain challenges. That's because the surgery process is just that—a process—rather than a one-day event. You'll have to meet with your surgeon once or twice prior to surgery and then several times after your procedure for routine follow-up. To ensure the best outcome, it's critical that you go to

these appointments. But if your surgeon is in a distant town or even in another state, it may be too inconvenient.

Having surgery out of town also presents some safety concerns. In the rare event that you develop complications once you return home, you may not be able to return quickly enough to your surgeon for treatment. To prevent this kind of scenario, it may be a good idea to coordinate your follow-up care with a local physician before you have surgery. Once again, surgeons who regularly treat patients who come from long distances may have someone on staff who can help you arrange follow-up care with a local doctor.

Overseas Surgery

You may be tempted to consider traveling outside the country for bariatric plastic surgery. You should be aware that selecting an international surgeon may be more difficult because regulatory and certifying agencies differ from country to country. This can make it difficult for you to understand whether or not a foreign doctor's credentials indicate adequate training and experience.

Remember that recovering from plastic surgery can take many weeks or even months. During this time, your plastic surgeon must be available to manage any potential complications. If your surgeon is overseas, you may not be able to get the care you need. And you should understand that most physicians in the United States are reluctant to assume the care of patients on whom they did not perform the original surgery.

Going overseas also has financial implications. For instance, if you have complications or need further care, your insurance may not cover your follow-up care. If you opt for breast implants, note that the valuable warranties that replace them free of charge and cover some of the surgical fees if they rupture or leak are not valid if you had surgery outside of the

United States. You also have little, if any, legal protection when you opt for surgery out of the country.

The Little Things Count, Too

In addition to education, training, and experience; an accredited facility; and a top-notch surgical team, you should keep several things in mind when choosing a plastic surgeon. For instance, simple things such as convenience, a courteous office staff, and a good rapport with your surgeon can play very important roles. When a surgeon's office is conveniently located, you may be more likely to show up for all of your postoperative appointments, which can ensure the best outcome possible.

Similarly, if the surgeon's office staff is welcoming and makes you feel comfortable and relaxed, your overall surgical experience may be enhanced. Even more important, when you feel comfortable with your surgeon, you are more apt to communicate your goals clearly and to ask questions. By asking questions and talking about your goals, you will have a much better understanding of what to expect from plastic surgery after weight loss, which increases your chances of being satisfied with your results.

Your Consultation

Your initial consultation can help you decide if a plastic surgeon is right for you. This face-to-face meeting is a golden opportunity for you to ask questions, to learn more about the various procedures that might benefit you, and to discover just how much improvement you might expect from bariatric plastic surgery. In addition, your consultation gives you the chance to explore financing options and to evaluate your comfort level with the doctor and the office staff. In most cases, this initial meeting should provide you with the information you need to make the best decision about going forward with the surgery process. Note that you may be expected to pay a fee for this initial consultation. In many cases, however, this fee may be applied toward the cost of your surgery.

What to Expect from Your Consultation

An initial consultation generally lasts at least thirty minutes and may take an hour or more depending on the surgeon. When you arrive at the surgeon's office, you'll probably be asked to fill out some routine medical history forms and may be asked for your insurance information. You can expect your consultation to involve a discussion of your goals and the procedures that may benefit you as well as a physical examination. In some offices, you also may meet with an office manager or nurse for more details on the surgery process or for information on payment policies and financing options. In general, your consultation should cover the following:

- Your medical history

- Your bariatric surgery and any complications associated with it
- What bothers you about your body and/or face
- Your goals
- Procedures that may benefit you
- Combining and/or staging procedures
- Total number of operations you would need to achieve your goals
- Timetable for performing each operation
- Surgical techniques and incision sites
- Length of procedures
- Type of anesthesia to be used and who will be administering it
- Surgical facility where your procedure or procedures will take place
- If you will require a hospital stay
- Pre- and postop instructions
- Side effects, risks, and complications of surgery
- Follow-up appointments
- Costs and payment options

Preparing for Your Consultation

Spending a little time preparing for your consultation can be very beneficial. In fact, the better prepared you are, the more productive this initial meeting will be. Start by doing some research about bariatric plastic surgery and the procedures offered. Make a list of questions to take with you, and bring a notebook so you can jot down the answers during your consultation. If you would be more comfortable having a spouse, family member, or friend with you during your consultation, make arrangements

so this person can accompany you. You may want to ask this person to take notes for you during the consultation so you can concentrate on talking with the surgeon.

In preparing for your consultation, consider your attitude, as well. To get the most out of your consultation, go with an open mind, and be prepared to listen carefully to your surgeon's recommendations. For example, you may think you've come to a conclusion about the procedures you'd like to have, but your surgeon may suggest a different procedure or a different combination of procedures as the best way to achieve your goals. By keeping an open mind, you will gain the most from your consultation experience.

Your Medical History

Before meeting with the surgeon, you will be asked to complete a medical history form. Some plastic surgery offices will ask you to fill out the form once you arrive for your consultation; other offices may send you the form so you can fill it out at home and bring it with you to your appointment. Key information to put in your medical history includes:

- Past surgeries, including bariatric surgery
- Any complications experienced as a result of surgery or anesthesia
- Past and current medical conditions, including obesity-related medical conditions
- Any skin irritations or health problems related to your excess skin
- Allergies and asthma details
- A list of medications (prescription, over-the-counter, vitamins, herbs, supplements, even illegal drugs) and dosages for each
- Alcohol consumption
- Smoking habits

Your medical history is extremely important and can help ensure the safety of your procedure. Be completely honest in filling out your history, and don't omit anything. If you aren't sure if something is pertinent, include it anyway. That way, your doctor can determine what is and isn't important.

Your surgeon will probably ask you to elaborate on any past surgeries, especially any recent bariatric surgery. Be prepared to discuss any surgical complications you've had in the past or any reactions to anesthesia. If you're currently experiencing any complications from bariatric surgery, such as vomiting, you may be better off delaying cosmetic surgical procedures until those complications are resolved. You also should be ready to show your surgeon any scars from past surgeries. Some types of scars can limit your body's ability to heal. Typically, this wouldn't prevent you from being able to have surgery, but it might change the way your surgery is performed.

Having a medical condition doesn't automatically rule you out as a candidate for surgery. However, if you have high blood pressure or a heart condition, your surgeon may take additional precautions to ensure your safety. In some cases, a medical condition may limit the type of procedures you can have or the number of procedures that can be performed during a single operation.

Inform your doctor about any skin conditions related to your excess skin. Documenting skin-related problems, such as rashes and irritations, can be helpful if you are planning to submit your surgery expenses to your insurance company.

Alerting your surgeon to any allergies or asthma can help prevent dangerous reactions to anesthesia or to any of the medications used during or after your procedure. Allergies to latex also should be noted so the surgical team can use gloves made of alternate materials.

Some medications, including certain over-the-counter remedies, vitamins, and herbal supplements, can raise the risks associated with surgery, such as excessive bleeding. That's why a thorough review of every drug you take, along with the dosage, is key for keeping you safe during

and after your procedure. Similarly, your surgeon will want to gauge your alcohol intake because drinking alcohol may lead to surgical risks, including excessive bleeding.



A lower body lift is a commonly performed bariatric plastic surgery. The procedure usually includes a tummy tuck, pubic lift, outer thigh lift, and buttocks lift.

Most surgeons won't perform post-weight loss plastic surgery if you currently smoke. This is because smoking severely limits your body's ability to heal incisions and increases the risk for complications. As mentioned previously, you'll be asked to refrain from smoking for several weeks prior to surgery and until you're completely healed.

Discussing Your Goals

When discussing your goals with your surgeon, be specific about the areas of your body that bother you, and be clear about what you hope to achieve. This gives your physician a chance to understand what's most important to you and to gauge whether or not your goals are realistic. During this discussion about your goals, your surgeon can help you understand just how much improvement you might be able to achieve.

Physical Examination

During your consultation, your surgeon will perform a physical examination. Depending on the areas of your body that concern you, you may be asked to disrobe and put on a gown during your exam. As part of your physical exam, your surgeon will be checking the location and amount of excess skin as well as the elasticity of your skin. In addition, he or she will assess if you need to lose fat as well as skin in order to achieve optimal results.

As your surgeon examines your body, he or she also will be checking for skin irritations or rashes as well as for hernias, which are rather common if you've lost a large amount of weight. Some surgeons may check your weight and your body mass index (BMI) as part of the exam. In addition, some simple measurements may be taken so that postoperative garments can be ordered for you.

Your surgeon may have you stand in front of a mirror as he or she discusses how your body may respond to bariatric plastic surgery. By gently lifting or pulling your skin in the areas to be treated, your surgeon will give you a clearer picture of the results you might expect. During this exam, you'll also see where the incisions will be made and where your scars will be.

Taking Photos

With your permission, the surgeon or an office staff member will take a series of photos of the areas to be treated. Typically, you will need to be completely nude for these pictures, which may include views of your front, back, and sides. Although you may be somewhat embarrassed to have these photos taken, rest assured that these "before" photos serve many purposes in the surgical process.

For instance, these images can assist your surgeon in the planning and execution of your procedure. They also may be used to document skin irritations or infections for insurance purposes. "Before" photos also will be

compared to your “after” pictures—usually taken at least three months after your procedure—so you can see the improvements in your body contours.

With your consent, your before-and-after photos also may be included in your surgeon's portfolio, which is shown to prospective patients. In this case, you can rest assured that your surgeon's office will take the necessary steps to maintain your privacy. For instance, your name will not appear with your photos, your face will not be visible with images of your body, and your pubic area will be masked.

Viewing Before-and-After Photos

Ask your physician if you can see before-and-after photos of former patients. This is a routine practice, and your surgeon should have numerous photos available for you to view. As you go through the before-and-after photos, keep an eye out for the length and placement of scars. Ask to see images of patients who have had the same procedures using the same techniques that are being recommended for you. And remember, doctors like to show off their best work, but the photos should reflect a range of results, including below-average, typical, and excellent outcomes.

Determining the Best Procedures for You

Based on your goals, your physical exam, your medical history, and your surgeon's personal preference, recommendations will be made about the procedure or procedures that will benefit you most. In many cases, your surgeon will suggest that you begin with surgery that treats the areas that bother you most, such as your abdomen and breasts or your abdomen, thighs, and buttocks. If you are considering a total body makeover, a staging timeline may be discussed.

Talking to Former Patients

To get a better idea about the quality of care you can expect from your surgeon, talk to former patients who have had post-weight loss surgery. Their experiences can give you more insight into the surgical process and can help you make your ultimate decision if you are still trying to choose between two or more surgeons. Simply ask your surgeon or the office staff to put you in touch with a couple of previous patients. Most surgeons maintain a list of people who are willing to talk to prospective patients like you who are thinking about bariatric plastic surgery. Questions you may wish to ask include:

- Were you pleased with the way the surgeon and the office staff treated you?
- Are you satisfied with your results?
- Did you feel like you were well-prepared for the process?
- Did you experience anything that you didn't expect?
- If you were to do it all over, would you do anything differently?
- Did you have any complications, and if so, how were they handled?
- Would you go back to this surgeon for additional procedures?

If you belong to a weight loss support group, you also may want to ask if any fellow members have had bariatric plastic surgery. If so, they may be willing to share their experiences with you so you have a better idea of what to expect from the process.

Making the Most of Your Consultation

To make the most of your consultation, take note of the intangibles. For instance, does the office staff greet you promptly and make you feel at ease? Do they answer all of your questions adequately? Considering that you will be dealing closely with the office staff for appointment scheduling, surgery

scheduling, pre-op and postop instructions, financial matters, and more, it's a good idea to evaluate your rapport with them.

Ideally, your doctor should be on time for your consultation. However, you should be aware that plastic surgeons are extremely busy and that scheduling problems may arise. This means that delays can occur regardless of the surgeon's best efforts to stick to the schedule.

Paying for Your Procedure

Bariatric plastic surgery can be expensive, and you may be concerned about the costs and how you will pay for them. During your consultation, you should have a thorough discussion about fees and payment options. This discussion may take place with the doctor, or in most cases, with an office member who specializes in financial matters.

Costs and Fees

Several fees are involved for bariatric plastic surgery procedures, including surgeon fees, anesthesia fees, and facility fees. When your surgeon quotes a price, find out exactly what that fee includes. For instance, are all pre-op and postop appointments included? Be sure to ask your surgeon about any additional fees if you experience complications, and inquire about his or her revision policy. If you require revision surgery to fine-tune your results or to treat a complication, you may be responsible for some or all of the charges.

Anesthesia fees cover both the person administering anesthesia and the medications given to you during your procedure. Facility fees typically include operating room and recovery room costs as well as any charges associated with an overnight stay in the hospital. Remember that these fees will be assessed for each operation you have, so if you are having multiple staged operations, your costs will increase.

Other costs associated with bariatric plastic surgery include any pre-op lab tests, postop prescriptions, or postop medical supplies you may need. And, of course, if your income is affected by taking time off from work, you should factor that into the total cost of having surgery.

Payments and Deposits

Most plastic surgeons expect payment in full prior to the day of your operation. In most cases, you will be required to make a deposit once you book a date for your procedure. Depending on the surgeon, the amount of the deposit may vary from as little as a few hundred dollars to one-third or even one-half of the surgery fee. The remainder of the surgical fee will be due before you have your operation. Note that facility fees and anesthesia fees also may be due in advance.

Unexpected Costs

In some cases, you may have complications that require prolonged hospitalization or additional surgery or medical therapy. If your primary surgical procedure was medically necessary, then the costs for these additional treatments will generally be covered by your health insurance. If, however, your surgery was for cosmetic reasons, most health insurance policies will not cover the costs for treatment of complications related to cosmetic surgery.

Some plastic surgeons purchase special insurance policies for their cosmetic surgery patients that are specifically designed to help cover the costs of treatment for complications resulting from plastic surgery. Ask your plastic surgeon if such coverage is provided for your bariatric plastic surgery.

Insurance

If you're like most patients, you may want to know if insurance will pay for your procedure. In general, elective cosmetic surgery procedures are not

covered by insurance. However, your insurance may cover procedures that are deemed medically necessary. Such procedures may include removal of a panniculus, hernia repair, or breast reduction. Common medical conditions that may qualify for insurance coverage include:

- Chronic rashes, irritations, or infections
- Difficulty walking due to a panniculus
- Chronic inflammation of the panniculus
- Back pain due to the weight of the panniculus
- Headaches or back, neck, or shoulder pain due to enlarged breasts
- Bra-strap grooving or ulceration that causes pain due to enlarged breasts
- Hernia of the abdominal wall or the umbilicus (belly button)

If you suffer from any of these conditions, be sure to alert your primary care physician or your bariatric surgeon so it can be properly documented. By documenting the problems and any failed treatments you may have tried, such as antifungal creams, you will have a better chance of having insurance cover the procedure. Of course, coverage varies widely and depends on your insurance carrier and your specific policy. In most cases, if there is a possibility that your procedure merits coverage, your surgeon's office staff may assist you in seeking the proper authorizations and in submitting the necessary paperwork.

Tax Deductions

Some expenses related to post-weight loss surgery may be tax deductible. Typically, only procedures that are medically necessary qualify for a tax deduction. If you plan to seek a tax deduction, consult with a certified public accountant or a tax attorney before your procedure. A tax professional can help determine if your procedure qualifies for a deduction and exactly what documentation you'll need.

Financing Options

In the event that insurance doesn't cover your procedure, you can take advantage of numerous financing options to help you pay for bariatric plastic surgery. For instance, financing may be available directly through your surgeon's office, and you may be able to fill out a credit application during your consultation. If not, you may want to take out a plastic surgery loan from one of a growing number of lenders offering health-care financing.

Lenders offer a variety of interest rates, and some even offer interest-free loans for a specified period of time to qualified applicants, so shop around. You can easily find lenders with a simple Internet search for "plastic surgery loans," or you may wish to ask the surgeon's office staff for lender recommendations. In some cases, you may choose to pay for your procedure using an existing credit card rather than applying for a loan.

Financial Considerations

It's understandable that the financial considerations associated with bariatric plastic surgery may cause you some concern. Considering the expense involved with multiple procedures, you may worry about making such a major investment to improve your body contours. However, with good financial planning and by shopping around for the best rates, you can minimize your feelings of anxiety and concentrate on achieving your goals for an enhanced appearance.

Preparing for Bariatric Plastic Surgery

From the moment you decide to go ahead with bariatric plastic surgery, you should begin preparing for the process. With the proper preparations, you can help ensure the safety and success of your procedure. And by planning ahead, you can make the entire experience a smoother, more enjoyable one. You may be surprised to discover that the steps you take now can actually lead to a more comfortable recovery and in some cases, a quicker healing process.

When to Schedule Your Procedure

Consider the timing when you schedule your procedure. If you will be having multiple procedures in a single operation, you may need to take a few weeks or more off from work. If possible, try to schedule your procedure for the least busy time of year as far as your workload is concerned. This can help alleviate any anxiety you may be feeling about taking time off.

Many post-weight loss procedures require you to wear tight-fitting garments for several days or even weeks during the recovery period. These garments may be uncomfortable during the summer months when it's hot and humid. Because of this, you may prefer to schedule your procedure to take place when the weather is cooler.

If you're hoping to "unveil" your new figure at an event, such as a wedding or a reunion, be sure to schedule your procedure at least several

months prior to the event. With most bariatric plastic surgery procedures, it can take months before you see your final results, so schedule accordingly.

Schedule Medical Lab Tests

To ensure that you are a good candidate for surgery, most plastic surgeons will require you to have a few medical tests prior to your operation. Depending on your age and your overall health, this may involve nothing more than some routine lab work. If you have certain medical conditions, however, you may need some additional testing. The good news is that since losing weight, your health has probably improved, and you are less likely to need extensive pre-operative testing. In addition, if you've successfully had bariatric surgery in the past twelve to eighteen months, you probably won't require more than routine testing.

Complete Blood Count

A complete blood count, or CBC, is a test that evaluates thirteen blood levels in your body. This test is used to detect any abnormalities or deficiencies in your blood levels that may affect your safety during your procedure or during your recovery. Plastic surgeons are especially interested in your white blood cell count, blood platelets, and hemoglobin. Correcting some issues may take many weeks or months prior to surgery, so early or baseline laboratory studies may be necessary.

White blood cells fight infection in the body. If your white blood cell count is low, it may increase your risk for infection during surgery and postoperatively. Blood platelets are essential for blood clotting. When platelets are low, it increases your chances of excessive bleeding during surgery.

Hemoglobin carries oxygen to your body's tissues and skin and is vital for healing. If your hemoglobin levels are low, it indicates a deficiency of red blood cells, which may mean that you have anemia. Anemia is a condition that can make you feel tired and weak and may even cause

shortness of breath. Anemia is a common concern if you've had bariatric surgery and lost a large amount of weight. That's because bariatric surgery can diminish your body's ability to absorb certain nutrients, such as iron, that are critical to red blood cell production.

If you've had anemia following your bariatric surgery, your plastic surgeon will pay careful attention to your hemoglobin levels. If your blood work shows that you have anemia, supplemental vitamins and possibly involvement by your internist may be recommended before you have surgery.

Urinalysis

A simple urine test can detect abnormalities that may signal a metabolic disorder or a kidney disorder.

Pregnancy Test

All women of childbearing age will be given a pregnancy test prior to surgery to avoid exposing an unborn child to the harmful effects of anesthesia.

Additional Medical Tests

In some cases, additional medical tests may be recommended. For instance, if you have a medical condition or if you are over a certain age, you may be required to have specialized tests. Such tests may include:

Mammogram

A mammogram is a test that uses X-ray technology to help detect breast cancer. If you are having some kind of breast surgery and you're over the age of 35, you may be asked to have a mammogram.

Comprehensive Metabolic Panel

This blood test is a group of fourteen tests that allows your physician to evaluate your kidneys and liver as well as your levels of electrolytes, blood protein, and blood sugar. Low levels of electrolytes, albumin, or total blood protein can increase the risks associated with anesthesia and surgery. Low levels of albumin also may cause healing problems. This test usually requires you to fast for ten to twelve hours prior to blood collection.

Electrocardiogram (EKG or ECG)

A test that looks at the electrical activity of the heart, an EKG or ECG can detect irregular heart rhythms. For this noninvasive test, small electrodes will be placed on your chest, arms, and legs. The electrodes are connected to a machine that reads the electrical activity and prints out a graph for your physician. Depending on your plastic surgeon, an EKG or ECG may be recommended if you are over a certain age.

Chest X-Ray

A chest X-ray provides an image of the heart, lungs, and other organs in the chest. This test may be ordered if you have a history of sleep apnea, which can affect pulmonary function and can damage heart tissues.

Blood Coagulation Studies

To measure your blood's ability to coagulate or stop bleeding, your physician may order blood coagulation studies. Abnormalities in these studies may indicate a risk for excessive bleeding during surgery. Causes for blood coagulation problems include nutritional deficiencies, liver problems, medications, and inherited bleeding disorders, such as hemophilia.

Consider Autologous Blood Donation

Autologous blood donation means that you donate your own blood prior to your surgery just in case you need a blood transfusion. With autologous blood donation, you eliminate the risk of incompatibility or