



Q&A

WITH A

PLASTIC SURGEON

In the past, you had what you were born with when it came to face, body and skin. Make-up could fix some flaws, but the rest was up to DNA. These days we have infinitely more control over our looks, with cosmetic surgery and non-surgical procedures gaining popularity every day. Our bodies have become our canvasses and surgeons are the artists.

We ask renowned plastic surgeon, DR NERINA WILKINSON, about trends in the industry, and things we should know before taking the plunge.

Q: In your 15 years of experience, have you noticed any particular trends in the procedures people are asking for?

A: South Africa is a sunny country and people tend to spend a lot of time outdoors. Most ladies in SA are therefore very body conscious, and I see many patients for breast surgery and liposuction. My patients tend to request the more natural European look, rather than the over-operated American look. Natural results have been enhanced by the availability of anatomically-shaped (pear-shaped) breast implants to give a much more natural breast shape, post-operatively.

Sun damage to the skin is definitely a problem in South Africa, and it is positive to see that many younger patients in their late twenties and early thirties are starting to anti-age their skin with regular skin treatments and nonsurgical treatments like Botox and fillers.

In connection with injectables, patients are also requesting to look



ABOVE DR NERINA WILKINSON

refreshed without the dreaded “Botox lips”. I think the latest trend is that I have moved away from filling lines, as was the approach in the past. The aim now is to beautify a face by enhancing a patient’s natural features. Deeper volumizing fillers are used to enhance facial features and to lift the soft tissues of the face to give a naturally rejuvenated look

Lipo-filling of the face (the injection of fat cells removed by liposuction) has also vastly improved the results of facelifts by achieving a more three-dimensional volumizing and lifting effect.

Q:

With this in mind, what are the most popular procedures you perform at your clinic?

A:

Body Contouring:

Often, patients are not asking “Does my bum look big”, but rather “Can you make my bum look bigger?” Firm, well-rounded buttocks are increasingly in demand, and body-sculpting is a common procedure. During this procedure unwanted excess fat is removed from certain areas of the body and re-injected into the buttock area to improve the buttock size and overall body shape.

Some patients who tend to have larger abdominal areas (especially after childbirth and as they grow older), will benefit from a tummy tuck. The procedure involves the removal of excess fat and skin from the entire abdominal area, and tightens the abdominal muscles. This procedure slims down and tones sagging, bulging stomachs.

Breast Contouring:

Breast surgery is definitely on the rise. Breast reductions have been commonly performed for many years; however, smaller reductions are most common with Caucasian patients. African patients tend to embrace their larger breast forms, and are requesting that their breasts be firmer and lifted, but still retain their larger cleavages.

Breast augmentation surgery is also becoming more common in all ethnic groups. Patients of all races tend to feel more confident and womanly when they have beautifully sized and shaped breasts. The media and fashion magazines have definitely played a role in encouraging more patients to increase their bust size.

Nasal Corrections (Nose Jobs):

Lately, I am receiving more requests for the reshaping of noses. Most patients are looking to refine their own noses and are definitely not looking to totally change their noses, as was the case with Michael Jackson. Subtlety is the key when it comes to noses, and it is important not to lose sight of the patient’s heritage. Many patients can achieve a narrowing of the dorsum of the nose with nonsurgical injection of fillers in five minutes in the rooms. For more extensive refinements, surgery is indicated.

Minimizing Signs of Aging:

Patients are increasingly looking to decrease the signs of aging. Chemical peels, Botox, and non-surgical fillers are very popular.

Q: There has been a stigma attached to plastic surgery in the past – is this still the case, or is that changing?

A: Despite the popularity of cosmetic surgery there is probably still a social stigma attached to those who undergo cosmetic procedures. Many patients in South Africa still regard cosmetic surgery largely as an “American indulgence” and prefer not to “tell all”.

The media has, however, made patients much more aware of available procedures. Patients today are not only the rich and famous - there is also a chance that the “girl next door” is having cosmetic work done. I love the mantra of the Brazilian people: “Beauty is a right, and the poor deserve to be ravishing too.”

The reason that the stigma still exists, however, is because some people inevitably take cosmetic procedures too far and start looking freaky. Watch any program with “housewives” in it and I can understand why patients have concerns about cosmetic surgery. There is, however, no need for any patient to look “done” and with the newer, natural procedures available, the stigma is decreasing.

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Q: Beauty has traditionally been the domain of women, but it’s becoming more and more socially acceptable for men to care about their looks. Has there been an increase in the numbers of men opting for cosmetic surgery, and what kinds of procedures do they tend towards?

A: I do believe that men are becoming more aware of their appearances. I would say that the proportion of male patients has increased from less than 2% to about 8-10%.

Many professional males undergo cosmetic surgery procedures. They are finding that today, in the workplace, they need to look fresh to compete with the younger men. The days when you were

promoted for your years of service and grey hair are over. Today it is all about performance. Older men are finding that they need to look refreshed and not tired.

I also think that when men get divorced, and they need to return to the dating market, they become more aware of their appearances.

Then there are the younger males who are just more aware of their appearances and anti-aging. Just as they are spending more time on their hair, gym, and clothes, they want to maintain their appearance as well.

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Q: Have you ever told someone they don't need plastic surgery?

A: Yes. It is important to psychologically assess patients, and for them to understand that not all patients will benefit from surgery.

Q: What should patients ask themselves before committing to surgery?

A: Am I a good candidate for this procedure? (It's important to understand if you have any limitations for a successful procedure.)

Can you achieve the effect I want? (You need to have realistic expectations.)



Q: You offer both surgical and non-surgical cosmetic procedures at your practice. With improvements in non-surgical options, do you see fewer people opting to go under the knife?

A: The face and neck are the parts of the body most exposed to the elements, and are therefore most affected by the aging process. Until recently, the conventional facelift was the treatment of choice to improve the signs of aging; however, many people have been put off the typical Hollywood “tight wind tunnel” faces. Patients find that today options are more varied and there is a range of lifts for every face. They are definitely more educated in the options presented by cosmetic surgery and more patients are making use of less invasive procedures to delay surgical procedures.

My patients are requesting more natural results with shorter recovery times to return back to their work and lifestyles. The most common non-surgical procedure for both men and women is still Botox; however the use of the “Liquid Facelift” to rejuvenate the face is becoming very popular. The procedure is designed to bring back

youthful features through the volumetric replacement of soft tissues lost with the process of aging. The procedure is performed in the office where a natural gel i.e. Voluma (Juvederm) or Sub Q (Perlane) is injected in specific regions of the face to restore the 3D structure. I use a six point injection technique to painlessly support the deeper facial soft tissues and lift the face. Patients can expect minimal downtime, and the “rested” or “lifted” look can last 12-24 months.

For patients who require more extensive volumereplacementtoachieve a more youthful appearance, I would suggest that they consider a “Stem Cell Facelift”. Unlike a normal facelift, in which the flaccid skin is excised (during surgery) to create an artificial firmness, a “Stem Cell Facelift” is performed solely by injection. The procedure involves harvesting fat from a part of the body with abundant fat deposits. This is purified and then precisely injected back into the part of your face that needs filling and contouring. By replacing the fat that has been lost due to aging, you get an uplifting effect. The procedure is performed under local anaesthetic in the day clinic. The amount of fat re-injected is always 30-40% more than needed, as a percentage of the fat will

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be reabsorbed. Patients are therefore more swollen and bruised than with the simpler “Liquid Facelift”, but the results are more permanent and the stem cells in the fat have regenerative potential. (The cells are often called the “Fountain of Youth”.)

Q: **Can the use of non-surgical options like Botox, peels and fillers prevent the need for more drastic age-related surgery later in life? If so, when should you start thinking about beginning anti-aging treatments?**

A: I would definitely suggest that prevention is better than cure, and I therefore encourage Botox and fillers in most of my younger patients. If a mother comes in for a treatment and her daughter accompanies her, I often suggest to the daughter to start treatments earlier - one can see by looking at her mother where her aging problems will be in the future. Late twenties to early thirties is a good time to begin.

Q: **Where do you see the industry heading in the next 20 years? What improvements or new techniques are just over the horizon?**

A: I think that the future of anti-aging lies in the process of volumizing the face with lipo-filling (injected fat cells). These cells are extremely high in stem cells and therefore have more than a filling effect - they actually stimulate all other cells to function optimally, and enhance overall facial rejuvenation.

I think that the buzz word right now is “stem cells”, and I believe that we have only just started to understand how valuable these cells are. They will play an important role in the future to rejuvenate and stimulate cells and organs during the aging process.

In the future stem cells will be used in facial surgery, breast augmentations without silicone implants, and many other rejuvenating procedures. Ultimately, they could be used in growing whole new organs like breasts, hearts, ears and more. ■