

Why Plastic Surgery Is On The Rise

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Plastic surgery has been booming in the past decade. Pop culture and social media helped to influence a new generation of people being proud and transparent about cosmetic enhancements. But in 2020, things took a dip.

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Hospitals and centres closed, staff members were laid off, and elective surgeries came to a halt. However, the plastic surgery industry bounced back strong. What we found after the moratorium on elective surgeries ended was that there was a pent-up demand for cosmetic procedures, which people did fulfil.

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The government put money into the economy, so it remained strong. People had disposable income and they still used it for cosmetic procedures. Americans working from home spent hours and hours watching themselves on camera, endlessly scrolling on social media, and experiencing inevitable downtime from work and social events.

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This all but benefited the plastic surgery industry, which saw a record number of patients as pandemic restrictions were lifted. I think most plastic surgeons thought, oh my god, it's really over because people are going to have a very difficult time really worrying about plastic surgery when they have this epidemic happening. But it ended up being the complete opposite.

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So just how long will the plastic surgery boom last? And with the new normal taking shape, what does the future look like for the industry? Born in Virginia in 1787, Dr. John Peter Mattauer is widely recognised as America's first plastic surgeon. But it was World War I that catapulted the plastic surgery industry into new realms. Extensive face and head injuries from war required physicians to innovate.

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While advances in blood transfusions, anaesthesia, and antiseptics allowed doctors to experiment with new techniques. By the 1960s, plastic surgery for purely cosmetic purposes was becoming more common. Procedures that were originally designed as medical treatments saw an uptick in patients getting them to enhance their appearance.

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For example, Botox was first approved by the FDA as a treatment for crossed eyes. But doctors soon realised those injection areas didn't have wrinkles. Not only are we reconstructing function of the face and body, but now we're also helping to bolster confidence by doing cosmetic procedures, which means sometimes restoring things the way they were.

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A youthful appearance is associated more with being energetic and virile and capable. And for many of us, that's very important in our day-to-day affairs. As baby boomers began to age, they wanted to appear younger and cosmetic procedures outpaced reconstructive ones.

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The 90s was also an era where doctors fought hard to dismantle the stigma that was associated with plastic surgery. There was a growing public perception, amid some sensationalised stories, that these surgeries were high risk. And in 1992, the FDA issued a moratorium on silicone breast implants following growing fears that the implants were unsafe.

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I am asking that physicians cease using silicone gel implants. But things soon took a turn, including healthcare reform. After extensive lobbying, in 1998, President Bill Clinton signed a bill into law allowing reconstructive surgery to be covered by health insurance.

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And by 2005, cosmetic procedures almost doubled over reconstructive ones. In 2020, over 24 million cosmetic procedures were performed worldwide. But it was the U.S. that had the highest number of both surgical and non-surgical treatments, leading the way with over 4,600,000 procedures.

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Brazil comes in second, often serving as a destination for hopeful plastic surgery candidates around the globe. There are three different categories when it comes to cosmetic plastic surgery. There are surgical procedures, non-invasive type procedures, and then there are injectables and fillers.

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The most common plastic surgery performed in the U.S. is breast augmentation, followed by liposuction and eyelid surgery. Botox was the number one non-surgical procedure worldwide. Although plastic surgery, like any surgery, carries risk, the vast majority of patients in the U.S. are satisfied with their results.

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In 2019, 98% of those who got breast augmentation and 97% of those who got a tummy tuck said they'd do it again. I am ecstatic with my results. I'm still projected to see the final result a few more months from now, but my surgeon and the team has said that I'm healing great.

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I'm happy with it. I haven't had any issues. Plastic surgery is a hefty investment.

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The average cost of breast augmentation is \$4,789, and Americans pay on average \$7,944 for a facelift. You get what you pay for. It is an investment.

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You don't want to go to the lowest common denominator. You really want to go to someone who's talented in what they do and how they do it. Cost barriers do motivate many to travel to other parts of the country or even the world in order to save money on their dream procedure.

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But that isn't always the best route. Plastic surgeries can go horribly wrong, as seen on the reality TV show Botched. A 2018 study found that 0.78% of plastic surgeries have complications, including infection, pulmonary embolism, and organ damage.

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Definitely medical tourism and plastic surgery was not as much post-COVID. Before COVID, it was a big industry, and unfortunately, just like everything else, there are great surgeons abroad and there are bad surgeons abroad. As there are great surgeons in Los Angeles, and there's some surgeons that aren't so great.

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But the problem is if complications arise. Going under the knife has always carried some sort of stigma. Many celebrities, including Kylie Jenner, Tyra Banks, and Lady Gaga, notoriously spoke out against plastic surgery and later came clean about getting some cosmetic work done.

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I think that the taboo for plastic surgery has often been that it's seen as something that is unnecessary, or when we say cosmetic surgery, seen as unnecessary. We've also seen cosmetic surgery as showing signs of insecurity, so that if you are doing cosmetic surgery to completely change your appearance, your appearance is part of your identity. So I think part of the taboo has been a rejection of identity because you're pursuing cosmetic surgery.

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But a few things have changed the negative perception of cosmetic treatments, namely pop culture and social media. What was once seen as a denial of self shifted into a popular and accepted trend for everyday people. People see themselves in a photograph on Instagram.

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They can filter their appearances and they see what they like as a change. So they can also image themselves to come up with a look that they think reflects themselves. And so they'll come and ask us if we can help them achieve that.

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But I think with social media, filters that come through social media, people seeing their friends and seeing people that they admire are morphed and trying to emulate that to some degree. So that's how social media has changed. It has become more acceptable.

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Another thing helping to change the narrative around aesthetic procedures is the introduction of ethnic plastic surgery. The 90s and early 2000s was an era of extreme plastic surgery transformations, often leading to a lot of criticism aimed at the patient. Doctors now say the key to a successful procedure is subtle changes while maintaining the patient's ethnic identity.

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I do feel that cosmetic procedures, because it's done for personal reasons, not necessarily done for attention or fame or to be an Instagram influencer, but done for personal reasons, that it should be somewhat discreet and that the results that we give should look natural and look congruent with the ethnicity, to not be extremely dramatic unless necessary, but usually subtle. The plastic surgery boom has also coincided with society's new emphasis on wellness. Today, more Americans are focussing on self-care and the needs of the individual.

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I think women are understanding that, that their desire to have cosmetic surgery doesn't mean they don't like who they are. Feel more comfortable saying, this is what I've done to make myself feel better. This is what I've done to make myself look better, more refreshed and more like my old self.

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And that's something to be proud of when you've taken ownership of your appearance. The COVID-19 pandemic shook the industry. The total number of cosmetic procedures decreased by 1.8% in 2020 compared to 2019.

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But that's mainly due to hospital and centre closures, not demand. Our schedule has never been this busy. There's not enough time in the day to do all the surgeries and procedures that our patients are requesting.

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Experts point to a phenomenon called the Zoom effect or the Zoom boom. COVID limitations shifted in-person meetings and social events to video calls, meaning more people became hypercritical of their facial features. That dissatisfaction led to a much higher interest in plastic surgery above the shoulder.

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When people were doing Zooms all the time, they'd really focus on their face because that's what they see, the reflection of Zoom and FaceTime and, you know, constantly looking back at yourself. You start looking and finding flaws, or maybe there were issues that you were concerned with forever and now it's coming out. So facial, nasal and eyelid surgery has been tremendously on the uptick.

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According to a study by ASPS, 11% of women surveyed said they were more interested in cosmetic procedures a year into the pandemic than they were prior to it. That number goes up to 25% for women who've already had a procedure. Some patients are motivated by the downtime spent at home.

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An increase in work-from-home policies across U.S. employers allows patients to fully recover at home while saving PTO. Others are motivated by the ability to recover in plain sight. More and more people are getting procedures done on features that are covered by their mask.

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However, the opposite is also having a moment. Doctors say they're seeing more patients getting work done above the nose since those features are highlighted when wearing masks. Another big influence due to COVID? Finances.

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I was able to finance my procedure through the savings that I acquired working from home during the pandemic and I also did use accredited finance. I think I would have needed to wait a little longer to get the procedure done if I had not saved as much as I had up until that point working from home. I was in a better position to pay any additional costs.

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Doctors say the future of plastic surgery is plastic surgery and some of the changes the industry has seen are here to stay. Some of the things that have changed about how we offer plastic surgery for us, we certainly are offering more virtual consults and those will remain and so access to the plastic surgery will probably remain to be more convenient. We've also created more office-based procedures for convenience and also for patient safety and I think that also will remain and that the way we access plastic surgery will be different and that the demand for plastic surgery in the setting of people who are still working, even if they're working virtual, that the recovery times need to be less dramatic and shorter.

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I think that probably won't change. And with cosmetic treatments becoming more advanced, more affordable and less taboo, the COVID-19 boom is just the beginning.