

Teens turn to facial plastic surgery to improve self-esteem.

The teenage years are replete with rapid changes physically and mentally as a child tries to forge his or her own path into young adulthood. On top of issues of independence, there are concerns about acceptance by peers and anxiety about appearance. Why are teenagers seeking facial plastic surgery and is it right for my teen?

Giving a good reason

In a recent survey found on a Web site geared toward teens, nearly 15,000 teenagers were asked, "How do you feel about teens and cosmetic plastic surgery?" The majority, 54 percent (7,622), responded that it depends on the situation. If your child feels inadequate physically and this affects him socially or academically, you may want to look into treatment options. Congenital defects, scarring, loss of facial function, asymmetry, or imbalance can create extreme distress unnecessarily if it can be corrected with treatment or surgery.

Here are some questions for you and your teen to consider:

Why do you want to change your appearance? Discuss with your teenager why he or she may feel insecure. Are the concerns well founded? One teenager suffered years of acne and was left with extensive scarring. After he and his parents pursued scar revision surgery, the teen expressed that his biggest joy was not being teased about the scarring like he had been teased about the acne. Teens who pursue facial plastic or reconstructive surgery are looking to feel more confident and have a better self-image.



What feature do you want to correct?

Physicians will not recommend an invasive procedure just so the teenager may look prettier. Surgeries that produce subtle results with minimal benefits are not recommended. Rhinoplasty, including cosmetic and reconstructive (e.g., correcting a nasal obstruction or cleft palate reconstruction), is the most popular procedure performed on teenagers. Other surgeries that may be appropriate include otoplasty (ear surgery), blepharoplasty (eyelid surgery), chin augmentation, and scar revision.

What are your expectations for the results?

Before deciding on a procedure or treatment option, discuss with your teenager what they hope to achieve by changing their appearance. Just because they alter their appearance does not mean that they will automatically become popular and get straight A's. Your physician will ensure that there is no pressure from family or friends to have surgery and that the teenager fully understands the procedure and results.

Making the decision

As a parent, you want your child to feel secure and self-assured and help your child avoid any hardship. If your teenager approaches you regarding changing his or her physical appearance, be sensitive, ask questions, and be realistic. Make an appointment with a facial plastic surgeon who can screen your teen for maturity, motivations, and expectations, in addition to the physical examination. Then together, you can discuss the possibility of surgery or other treatments.

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