

Saving Face: Get sound advice before undergoing cosmetic procedure

BY HALA ARYAN
Copley News Service

People are peeling, injecting, lasering and lifting their way back to a more youthful complexion.

The plethora of procedures and the people offering to perform them can be overwhelming. And stories of botched procedures can be frightening.

Skin experts say that with knowledge and realistic expectations, consumers can get rejuvenated skin safely.

"What we can do now is much more exciting than what we did just five years ago," said Dr. Steve Laverson, a plastic surgeon in Southern California.

Physicians offer several tips to wade through the hype, get

sound advice and find the right practitioner.

Although aestheticians can perform facials and mild peels, a dermatologist or plastic surgeon should perform injections, dermabrasion and lasering. A plastic surgeon should perform cosmetic surgery.

Plastic surgeons urge people to look for a certification from the American Board of Plastic Surgery.

"It means that the doctor has met the highest standard out there of cosmetic or plastic surgery," Laverson said. But many people are performing plastic surgery without the proper certifications and qualifications. The American Board of Medical Specialties, which oversees all of the coun-

try's medical boards, does not recognize the American Academy of Cosmetic Surgery.

"It's a lucrative field ... so a lot of people are taking up the bandwagon of becoming plastic surgeons," said Dr. Munish Batra, a plastic surgeon in San Diego. "When someone gets a bad result, the whole plastic surgery community looks bad and it turns out oftentimes that it wasn't even a plastic surgeon who did the work."

Batra also cautions against using any surgeon or dermatologist who pressures a patient into a procedure. Patients also should get several opinions before undergoing any procedure and make sure a plastic surgeon is allowed to operate in a hospital.

Skin treatments range from the most mild, such as light peels to rejuvenate the skin, to face-lifts to reduce sagging.

Most people start with chemical peels that can remove the dead skin cells in the top layer of skin and allow smoother, clearer and more glowing skin underneath to come through.

Aestheticians at spas and medical offices can perform light peels, done with alpha-hydroxy acids. These can treat fine wrinkling, dryness, uneven pigmentation and acne without downtime and with minimal risk of scarring.

Deeper peels treat deeper wrinkles, more severe pigment problems, blemishes or damaged skin and should be performed in a dermatologist's or

plastic surgeon's office. These require up to two weeks of recuperation.

Dermabrasion and dermaplaning refine the skin's top layers through surgical scraping and can diminish scars, smooth out fine wrinkles and remove precancerous growths.

Microdermabrasion mixes gentler abrasion with suction to remove the outer layer of skin.

"Microdermabrasion has virtually no complications," said Dr. Susan Stuart, a dermatologist at Scripps Memorial Hospital La Jolla. "It's very superficial, patients like it, all skin types do well. I really like that type of rejuvenative procedure."

Looking good

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tion of board-certified plastic surgeons who specialize in cosmetic surgery, has announced its predictions for cosmetic surgery in 2005.

Among them are that arthroscopic facial rejuvenation procedures are expected to become more popular; experimental techniques for non-invasive fat removal, as a future alternative to liposuction, will be tested; the number of patients seeking plastic surgery for body contouring after dramatic weight loss will rise by at least 20 percent; and a growing number of


women will opt for smaller-size breast implants.

Locally, Dr. Matthew Smith of Great Lakes Plastic Surgery Center of Traverse City said that aesthetic surgery is often sought out because of the role our perception of ourselves and our bodies plays in our overall confidence and personal and professional interactions.


"There are many different reasons why someone would choose to have aesthetic surgery done," said Smith, "but nearly all of them involve changing or improving something, with the end result feeling better about yourself."

Nancy Sundstrom is a local freelance writer.

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