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## **Plastic surgery in Billings not the same as in Hollywood**

**By DR. ALAN MUSKETT For The Gazette**

It's weird watching a TV show about your job. I am a plastic surgeon, and several programs, such as "Extreme Makeover," "The Swan" and "Nip/Tuck" which show several elements conflicting with with my own experience.

For one thing, the surgeons are glamorous and sexy and young. My partners - Walt Peet and Steve Grosso - and I are all dads over 40 with long marriages and, frankly, we're a little low on the glamour scale. Unlike the TV shows, much of our practice is non-cosmetic-reconstructive procedures done on accident victims or children with congenital malformations.

Another thing I don't recognize in the TV practices is the patients. It seems like they want to be someone else with a new face, nose, hair - everything.

What is plastic surgery like in the real world, say, in Billings, Montana? Let's look at Plastic Surgery 59101.

Patients aren't celebrities

Most of our patients are from Montana, Wyoming and the Dakotas. More than 70 percent have an annual family income of less than \$60,000. Our clientele of celebrities and socialites is modest, although from the look of some of their results, they should have been seeing us.

Our patients are reasonable folks who aren't trying to "make over" their lives. For the most part, they aren't trying to cope with depression by having an operation. Genetics, time or injury has rendered some aspect of their physical person unsatisfactory.

Simply put, they want something fixed that will make the mirror a little friendlier, but aren't expecting that "swan" to come crashing through the front window. We like to think in terms of "reasonable procedures for reasonable people."

So what is reasonable? Let's look at some examples:

## Liposuction

This is the most popular surgical procedure, not counting fillers and botox. It's hard to deny its appeal - making fat disappear. If a person is just plain, well, fat - to be indelicate but frank - this is not a reasonable procedure. But if you have an area or areas of disproportionate lipodystrophy (fat), this is a great operation.

Local areas that just won't go away with weight loss or exercise are very effectively treated with liposuction. Examples are those "saddle bags" on the lateral thigh, the "love handles" on the sides or the "jelly roll" around the belly button. Most liposuction can be done with sedation as an outpatient. One of the more popular procedures is the in-and-out "double chin" liposuction. The bottom line is, liposuction isn't a weight loss program, but can sure help with the stubborn holdout bulges.

## Eyelids/eyebrows

When a cartoonist depicts a tired or bedraggled person, what does he draw? Eyes are the portal to our emotional state and energy level. Unfortunately, we can be rested and in a great mood and still look old and tired.

Drooping eyebrows and baggy skin around the eyes can send the wrong message to the mirror and other people in our lives. In some cases, eyebrows and eyelids can sag right over our ability to see. Removing excess skin from the lids or lifting a droopy brow can have a rejuvenating effect. Getting rid of those bags on the lower lids does a lot to make someone look peppier. It's not insignificant surgery, and other than looking like you lost a 12-round bout for a few days, the recovery isn't too bad.

## Face lift

The flagship procedure of cosmetic surgery, the "facelift" evokes images of movie stars, aging debutantes, Burt Reynolds and Joan Rivers.

"Facelift" has even become part of the modern lexicon: buildings get facelifts, government agencies get facelifts. The term has come to mean transformation. In reality, a well-done facelift is a subtle re-suspension of facial fat pads and muscles combined with gentle re-draping of skin. The result is not "Oh wow, you had a facelift," but more of a "Have you lost weight?" or "Have you been on vacation?"

The goal is a younger, rested look with a sharper jaw line, smooth neck and appearance of higher cheekbones. The idea is to look good, not "done."

## Breast augmentation

The female breast, for better or worse, is part of the definition of the female form. In a way, it seems silly that a couple pounds of soft tissue is such a big deal, but that is the reality. Breast augmentation patients, for the most part, are not normally endowed persons seeking to become "Dolly-sized."

Our typical patient is a 30-something mom who had a couple of kids and her breasts "disappeared." Some are athletic women with low body fat who have minimal breast tissue and just can't find clothes that fit correctly.

Rather than being vain or body dysmorphic, these women just want to look like most other women. Modest breast augmentation with an implant will accomplish that goal.

A "lift" procedure, often combined with an implant, can do much to restore a more age-appropriate figure. Interestingly, we do many operations to reduce the size of breasts that cause neck and back pain.

## Tummy tuck

Abdominoplasty, or a "tummy tuck," is the removal of excess skin from the abdominal wall and the tightening of abdominal muscles. Weight loss after pregnancy or major dieting will often leave excess skin which looks like a big apron. This procedure can restore a more reasonable shape to the waist and tummy. It is a fairly big operation involving a good deal of tissue rearrangement. You'll need two to three weeks off for this one.

## Lesser procedures

There are some "tweaks" in plastic surgery that can have quite an effect. Botulinum toxin, or "Botox," paralyzes facial muscles that cause wrinkles and frown lines. Filler injections can soften fine lines and lush up lips. Lasers can tighten up wrinkles. These are all becoming popular as busy people want to minimize downtime and look better.

In general, however, if you want to get a big impact, you're looking at bigger procedures.

No surgical procedure should be taken lightly. Complications can and do occur, and surgery is not scar-free. But with reasonable expectations, reasonable people having reasonable procedures can get some really nice results.

*Dr. Alan Muskett is a plastic surgeon with Plastic Surgery of Billings.*