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HOW TO CHOOSE A PLASTIC SURGEON BY DR. SHAHRAM SALEMY

We are fortunate to live in an area with multiple outstanding providers of plastic and cosmetic surgery services. However, this is a double-edged sword, as the wealth of talent can overwhelm an individual looking to choose a surgeon for the first time. There are a few simple steps that can help guide you both as a consumer and more importantly as a patient, to help you make a more informed choice.

Verify Their Qualifications • The surgeon's training and Board Certification status are two straightforward ways to begin your search. It sounds simple, but formal residency training in plastic surgery, facial plastic surgery, or dermatology is not a requirement for an individual to present himself as a cosmetic surgeon. Find out where your doctor did his training and for how many years. The key point is that it was a formal, fully accredited program. Second, verify their Board

Certification status. Board Certification is a rigorous process, and it should serve to provide an extra measure of confidence to the patient. Both of these pieces of information will usually appear on the doctor's website, but they can also be verified online (The American Board of Medical Specialties, www.abms.org).

Three Questions to Ask at Your Consultation •

Three simple questions will go a long way toward giving you a sense of your surgeon's abilities and whether he or she will be able to meet your expectations. First, ask about his/her experience, both in terms of years in practice as well as years performing the procedure you are considering. Second, ask to see before and after pictures. Finally, ask if it would be possible to speak to a couple of former patients. This will give you a firsthand account of how the surgeon cares for patients before and after surgery.

Two Warning Signs •

There are two red flags that should give you pause during a consultation. The first is if you feel pressure from your doctor to have surgery right away. This simply should

not occur during a routine visit. Not only are they supposed to serve you on your timeline, but patients tend to have a much more positive experience once they feel fully comfortable with all aspects of their procedure, and this sometimes takes two or three more visits to the doctor. If you feel pressure, take a step back and think things over. The second warning sign is the doctor who does not think you need a second opinion. You should feel comfortable seeking opinions from other surgeons to help you make a more informed decision. If your doctor feels that "he is the only one who can perform this procedure," take some time to think that statement over, as it is often not the case.

Go With Your Gut • After the research is over, your questions answered, and the warning signs avoided, it comes down to comfort level, and this is different for everyone. Take your time, review your options, and pick the surgeon with whom you feel most comfortable, not only to achieve the results you desire, but to be there for you before surgery as well as during your recovery. In the end, these efforts will pay off.



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