

Plastic Surgery or Cosmetic Surgery:

What's the Difference?

Submitted by Chad Tattini, MD,
Plastic Surgery Associates



The terms “plastic surgery” and “cosmetic surgery” are often used interchangeably. Technically, however, they are not the same thing. Nor are they performed for the same reasons. Below are some common misunderstandings about these terms and the facts that differentiate them.

Plastic and cosmetic surgery is the same thing.

In reality, cosmetic surgery is a subset of plastic surgery. They are similar in that the ultimate goal is to make a part (or parts) of the body better, but “better” in different ways. Cosmetic surgery is performed to make a part of the body more aesthetically pleasing. The treated body part already functions properly, so surgery focuses on enhancing appearance. Cosmetic surgery is usually elective and includes procedures such as breast enhancement, tummy tuck, rhinoplasty, facelift, liposuction, BOTOX or dermal filler injections, or similar techniques.

Plastic surgery is a specialty that involves the reconstruction of a body part that has some functional defect due to congenital disorder, trauma, burns, or disease. It is reconstructive in nature—the ultimate goal is to restore function. Plastic surgery includes breast reconstruction, burn repair, hand surgery, cleft palate repair, and scar revision.

Some body parts may have procedures that fall within both specialties. For example, breast augmentation is usually cosmetic, breast reduction is often cosmetic, but may fall under the category of plastic surgery if large breasts are causing medical problems such as back or neck pain. Breast reconstruction is always considered plastic surgery. Similarly, rhinoplasty (a “nose job”) is cosmetic if the patient wants to change what their nose looks like for aesthetic purposes; but rhinoplasty due to a severe trauma or difficulty breathing would be considered plastic surgery.

Cosmetic and plastic surgeons receive the same training.

Each specialty has distinct goals and procedures; the training is distinct for each as well. They also have unique certification requirements. The American Board of Plastic Surgery oversees the training and certification of plastic and reconstructive surgeons, while the American Board of Cosmetic Surgery certifies plastic surgeons. Cosmetic surgery procedures are only a small portion of the surgical categories

that a plastic surgeon trains to perform, while all of the training categories for a cosmetic surgeon are dedicated to procedures that enhance appearance rather than improve function.

Questions and confusion are common on the patient side of the plastic and cosmetic surgery equation, as well. Here are some of the most frequent misconceptions about those who undergo these procedures:

Only wealthy people have cosmetic procedures done.

Statistics reveal that most patients are middle class with a median income of about \$80,000. Because cosmetic procedures are elective in nature, they use their own disposable income to pay for the surgery. Many cosmetic surgeons offer financing options for most procedures. Many of the less invasive procedures such as BOTOX or dermal filler injections or laser treatments are about the same cost as a cut and color at a hair salon.

Only vain people have cosmetic surgery.

Most people seeking cosmetic procedures are normal, everyday people with realistic expectations. They are not egocentric, self-absorbed people that obsess about their appearance. For the most part, they simply want to look their best. Most patient feedback shows that improvements in body image provide greater satisfaction, higher self-esteem, and improved quality of life. People simply feel better and have more confidence when they are happy with their appearance.

Cosmetic surgeries involve long, painful recovery periods.

Although physical healing takes time, patients typically can resume their normal activities in just a few days or weeks. Advances in surgical techniques, improved methods for controlling nausea and vomiting due to anesthesia, and better pain control practices significantly decrease downtime for patients.

Dr. Chad Tattini has recently moved his practice to a new state-of-the-art building located at 902 N. Hershey Road in Bloomington. Dr. Tattini is on the cutting edge of many cosmetic and reconstructive surgeries. He currently operates in the comfort and privacy in his new office. For more information or to set up a consultation, you may call 309-664-1007 or visit his website www.chadtattinimd.com.