

Cosmetic procedures: what do I need to consider?

What to expect of doctors who carry out cosmetic procedures.

Before your first appointment

Find out more and talk it through

If you're considering having a cosmetic procedure, do your research on the procedure, the doctor who will treat you and the place in which it will be carried out. The NHS Choices website is a good place to start:

[bit.ly/NHSChoices_cosmetic](https://www.nhs.uk/choices/cosmetic).

You might want to talk it through with friends and family or your GP, or find out about the experiences of people who have had similar procedures, for example through online discussion forums.

Check your doctor's registration

Make sure the doctor who will carry out your cosmetic procedure is registered with us and holds a licence to practise – only doctors who are on our register with a licence to practise are allowed to treat patients in the UK. To see our register, go to **www.gmc-uk.org/register**.

What if your practitioner isn't a doctor?

We know lots of procedures may be carried out by other professionals. Again, NHS Choices (see above) has some useful advice on this.

Check your clinic or hospital

For surgical procedures

If you're considering a surgical cosmetic procedure, make sure the clinic or hospital is registered with the relevant regulatory body. These are:

- England – Care Quality Commission:
www.cqc.org.uk
- Northern Ireland – The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority: www.rqia.org.uk
- Scotland – Healthcare Improvement Scotland:
www.healthcareimprovementscotland.org
- Wales – Healthcare Inspectorate Wales:
www.hiw.org.uk

These regulators inspect clinics and hospitals, to check that their standards of practice are being met and care is delivered in a safe environment. You can find inspection reports on their websites.

The **Royal College of Surgeons of England** website has information that can help you choose a hospital and a surgeon – no matter what part of the UK you live in - who has the right skills and experience for the procedure. See www.rcseng.ac.uk/cosmeticsurgerystandards.

For non-surgical procedures

Organisations that provide only non-surgical cosmetic procedures, such as dermal fillers or Botox[®], should also do so in a safe and suitable environment. In Scotland, organisations that provide these procedures are regulated by Healthcare Improvement Scotland (see above). Across the UK, some providers sign up to voluntary registration with organisations such as:

- Save Face: www.saveface.co.uk
- Treatments You Can Trust: www.treatmentsyoucantrust.org.uk

Are you having a cosmetic procedure abroad?

If you're thinking of having a cosmetic procedure outside the UK, you might also consider:

- whether the doctors and treatment providers have the same standards of care and safety as in the UK
- whether any language barriers could prevent good communication and discussion about your procedure
- arrangements for follow-up care and dealing with any complications that might arise
- the potential cost implications of having to return overseas for any necessary follow-up care
- any additional risks that might arise from travelling for the procedure – for example, increased risk of deep vein thrombosis from flying
- medical insurance arrangements and who will pay if something goes wrong
- whether your travel insurance for the trip is adequate and will cover having the cosmetic procedure.

Meet your cosmetic doctor

Some questions to ask

- Will you carry out the procedure yourself? (If not, ask to meet with the doctor who will treat you.)
- Have you done this procedure before?
- What does the procedure involve and how long will it take?
- How long will it take for me to recover?
- What sort of outcome can I expect?
- My procedure involves implants or injectables – can you confirm these meet approved guidelines?
- What are the potential risks and complications for me of the procedure?
- How long will the benefits last? Will I need to have the procedure done again?
- What potential costs are involved, including if anything goes wrong or needs to be repeated?
- What is covered (and not covered) by the aftercare you provide?
- Do you have insurance or indemnity? And what is the process if something goes wrong?

These are just some sample questions. For more suggestions, visit the Royal College of Surgeons of England

website or other sites, such as bit.ly/bapras_asksurgeon.

Give your doctor the right information

Make sure you tell your doctor about any medicines you take and other health-related issues you have.

Your doctor may want to consult with your GP. They need your permission to do this – you have the right to say no, but this may affect the doctor's view about how safe the procedure is and whether to go ahead.

Know what to expect from your doctor

Getting your consent

The doctor who will carry out your procedure must speak to you and get your consent for it to go ahead. They must not delegate this responsibility to other staff, because only the doctor who will carry out the procedure knows what they can achieve in your specific circumstances.

Giving your consent to a procedure is more than just signing a form. You must have enough information about the procedure, including any anaesthetic required, to be able to give your consent to it. This must include a discussion about the risks and benefits and the likely outcome of your treatment.

Your doctor must listen to you and answer any questions that you may have about the procedure. If there is anything

you don't understand, you can always ask them to explain it again.

Your doctor must also give you enough time to reflect on the pros and cons of having the procedure and to decide whether you want to go ahead.

The amount of information and time will vary from procedure to procedure and person to person – what's important is that you have all the information you need, and enough time to consider it, so you can make your decision.

Your right to change your mind

Even once you have decided to go ahead with a procedure, you can change your mind at any stage. Your doctor must tell you this and explain what the practical and financial implications will be if you decide not to go ahead.

Considering the overall benefits to you

Even if you are sure you want a procedure, your doctor must reach their own view about whether this will be of overall benefit to you. They will take your wishes and preferences into account, but your doctor is not under any legal or professional duty to provide the procedure if they don't think it is appropriate.

If your doctor decides not to provide the procedure, they should explain why and discuss other available options, including your right to a second opinion.

Your doctor must consider your psychological needs and refer you to an experienced colleague if the care you need is outside their expertise. Similarly, if they feel they can't safely carry out the procedure for any reason, they must refer you to another practitioner.

Conflicts of interests

Your doctor must tell you if they have any financial or commercial interests in the procedure you're considering, or in the clinic where you'd have it, so you can decide whether those interests could influence the advice they give you. For example, a doctor might own the rights to a procedure, or their family member may get a share of the profits from a clinic.

Injectable prescription-only cosmetic procedures

Your doctor must not prescribe injectable cosmetic medicines (such as Botox[®], Dysport[®] or Vistabel[®]) by phone, video-link or online.

After your procedure

Make sure you're clear about what to look out for that might indicate a negative reaction to the procedure, and when you should contact the clinic.

Your doctor must:

- make sure you have the right medicines and any equipment you may need to care for yourself
- tell you whether you need any follow-up procedures or appointments
- make sure you have the details of someone you can contact at the clinic who is suitably qualified to advise you if you experience complications
- ask for your feedback and check that you are satisfied with the outcome
- give you written information about the procedure you've had, including any medicines or devices used. This is important and will help you if you have a negative reaction, need any further procedures or if a product is recalled.

Rules about advertising cosmetic procedures

The marketing of cosmetic procedures must be factual, clear and not misleading. It must not target children or young people and it must not try to pressure you into making decisions quickly (for example, by using time-limited special offers). Cosmetic procedures must not be offered as prizes.

If you have concerns and want to check whether the advertising used by a doctor, clinic or hospital is acceptable, you can find out about this at www.cap.org.uk.

Other useful organisations

The Health and Social Care Information Centre has a breast and cosmetic implant registry. This aims to capture data about all breast implant surgery carried out privately and by the NHS and will be expanded to cover other types of implant in the future. The register helps to make sure patients can be traced in the event of an implant recall. See www.hscic.gov.uk.

The Advertising Standards Authority is the UK's independent regulator of advertising across all media. Its work includes acting on complaints and proactively checking the media to take action against misleading, harmful or offensive advertisements. See www.asa.org.uk.

The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency regulates medicines, medical devices such as breast implants, and blood components for transfusion in the UK. See bit.ly/MHRA_website.

The Private Healthcare Information Network collects and publishes surgical information about independent healthcare to help patients make informed choices. See www.phin.org.uk.

What to do if you are unhappy about the care you get from your doctor

If you have a concern or complaint about your doctor, this is usually best settled directly with them or the organisation they work for.

However, if you think a doctor is putting the safety of patients at risk or has seriously fallen short of the standards we expect, go to:

- www.gmc-uk.org/patientshelp.

You can read the guidance that doctors must follow at:

- www.gmc-uk.org/cosmetic.

Email: **gmc@gmc-uk.org**

Website: **www.gmc-uk.org**

Telephone: **0161 923 6602**

General Medical Council, 3 Hardman Street, Manchester
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