

profile:

When surgery is more than just cosmetic



She got to the point where every time she looked in the mirror she thought of *Ally McBeal*, the satirical legal drama that played out on nighttime TV. It wasn't about any particular character or legal issue, but about the episode where the whole law firm became fascinated by the "wattle," that turkey-like appendage of loose skin that often hangs from the necks of women of a certain age or weight loss.

Like the 66-year-old woman interviewed for this story, they just happen to have a wattle.

"I didn't have a fat face, just this huge wattle," says the Seaside woman who chooses to remain anonymous. "I got tired of looking in the mirror. When I wanted to wear a pretty lace blouse or a turtleneck sweater, it would hang over the top. It just didn't look good, so I stopped wearing them."

Until she decided to do something about it.

"I had breast cancer in 1996-97," she says. "After you've lived through that and are on your way to recovery, you start looking for ways to feel vital again. I decided to have my double chin removed, and I've never regretted it."

Under the care of plastic surgeon David Morwood, vice chair of the Maxillofacial/Plastic/Dental division at Community Hospital, she was in and out of surgery the same day. She experienced no bruising and healed quickly; and although she had anticipated a four-to-six-week wait for the swelling to fully disappear, she experienced a much shorter recovery.

"If it's important to you and you can afford it, do it," she says. "That's the whole thing of it. I've always said 'If something bothers you, and you can take care of it, do.' When you look in the mirror and it seems like you're tired all the time or you just don't feel good about yourself, if there are things you can do about it, you should. I'm not the one who runs in for every little thing, but if it's significant enough, do it. You can feel liberated."

Though she celebrated her 48th wedding anniversary with her husband last year, she is quick to point out she had the cosmetic surgery not to please her husband but to satisfy herself. "He said it was up to me what I did; he liked me either way. But he knew I would feel better, so he was very supportive of my decision."

Her decision was not, however, entered into lightly. In fact, she let a couple of years pass between the time she began to investigate the surgery and the day she actually had it done.

"I recommend that anyone check it out very seriously," she says. "Get ideas from others and from your doctor, look at pictures, and get a good idea of what you really want and why. Stand in front of the mirror and pull back on the area in question. If you like it better when it's not there, then go talk to your doctor."

She also recommends confirming that the doctor is board-certified, has a lot of experience, and has hospital privileges if needed.

"You don't have to make up your mind right away; maybe six months will go by before you decide to have the work done," she says. "Make sure you are realistic and that your expectations are within a normal range. Life isn't likely to turn upside down and change for you just because you had cosmetic surgery, but it can make you feel brighter and more vibrant."

PULSE

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Aging Well

Staying youthful in mind, body, and spirit

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Cutting a path to confidence

The fat kid finally loses weight in college and lands a bid to join a fraternity. The girl whose face was masked by acne miraculously outgrows her malady and takes her first dip in the dating pool. The brainy boy gets his ears pinned, his braces off, and his first pair of contact lenses. The shy girl gets a nose job, pierced ears, and a butterfly tattoo. It's all just part of growing up, right?

So when is that magic moment when growing up shifts to getting old? When the college diet is replaced by liposuction, and the skincare regimen includes collagen and Botox®? When contacts give

way to LASIK surgery? When Rembrandt® toothpaste is bested by DaVinci® porcelain veneers? When the nose job is nothing compared to the chin implant and the eye lift and the breast augmentation and the tummy tuck? It's all just part of getting old, right?

For some, cosmetic surgery is about forestalling the inevitability of aging. For others, it's a way to correct a flaw perceived to lie at the root of a socioeconomic problem such as getting passed over for a promotion, sitting home every Saturday night, or receiving premature invitations to early bird specials.

Will cosmetic surgery resolve that? And if so, is it the updated appearance or the confidence purchased at the plastic surgeon's office that actually lands the job, the date, the best table in the restaurant? Does it matter, as long as it does the trick?

"A lot of older people come into my office not wanting to look like a different person, but to look just as young or as vibrant as they feel," says Dr. David Morwood, a Monterey plastic surgeon who serves as the vice chair of the Maxillofacial/Plastic/Dental division at



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Community Hospital. "Some patients believe it will give them a competitive edge to look more youthful in the workplace. Others feel it will be good for their relationship. They tell us in training that a plastic surgeon is a psychiatrist with a knife. It's about building self-confidence, which addresses a core issue of human nature — our desire to look normal, to look good, to be accepted."

Certainly, some people do want to look dramatically different. Others just want to look younger. But many, says Morwood, particularly the older they get, just want to look refreshed and healthy. It's OK to be

60 and OK to look 60, but it is universal to want to look your best.

"People should think about what they want to change before they come in," says Morwood. "They should seek a board-certified plastic surgeon who is experienced in the procedure they want. And they should be open and willing to tell the doctor exactly what they want. Even if they don't know the procedure they need, they can describe the changes they're looking for. The responsible surgeon will tell them exactly what can be done realistically and safely, and what they can expect." ~

Did you know?

- "Plastic" surgery stems from the Greek root "plastikos," meaning to shape or mold.
- 11.5 million cosmetic procedures were performed in the United States in 2006, up 7 percent from 2005. Americans spent \$12.2 billion on these procedures.
- In the same year, 5.2 million reconstructive operations were done in the United States.
- More than 100,000 facelifts were performed in the United States last year.
- The most common operations for women are breast enlargement, liposuction, nose reshaping, eyelid lifts (blepharoplasty), and tummy tucks (abdominoplasty).
- The most common operations for men are nose reshaping, eyelid surgery, liposuction, hair restoration, and breast reduction (gynecomastia correction).
- About 10 percent of all cosmetic operations are performed on men.