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# The Five P's of Plastic Surgery Safety

Peter W. Bray, MD, MSc, FRCS(C)



**T**he topic of safety should rightfully be of prime concern to anyone considering surgery, whether plastic surgery or otherwise. Fortunately, modern surgical and anesthetic techniques are safer than ever before and are constantly improving.

Many procedures that once required inpatient hospital admissions of several days are now performed safely and comfortably like clockwork on an outpatient basis. Nonetheless problems and complications can still occur, some garnering mainstream media attention and weighing heavily on the perceptions of the public.

While the internet does provide some useful information on the topic of safety in plastic surgery, much of it originates from websites based in the United States. Because the regulatory environment in the US differs from Canada, the safety guidelines on American sites often have little relevance to Canadian consumers.

*Thus, I decided to create a simple safety checklist for Canadians considering cosmetic plastic surgery. This list is not intended to be exhaustive, but simple enough for easy recall and enough to prompt some key questions during your consultation with a surgeon; The "Five P's" of Plastic Surgery Safety - Right Patient, Right Practitioner, Right Procedure, Right Place, and Right Price.*

**Right Patient:** Are you, the patient, at your optimal health and state of mind prior to surgery?

A major factor influencing the safety of your surgical procedure is your own health status. Expect your surgeon to take a detailed medical and surgical history, review your medications, prescription or otherwise, and perform a careful physical examination. Failure to do so should raise legitimate concerns about the surgeon's commitment to

your safety.

You can facilitate this investigation process by freely sharing your health information with the surgeon, including medical incidents which may seem unrelated such as a history of blood clots while traveling or excessive bleeding with minor injuries. Any of your chronic medical conditions including hypertension, asthma, and diabetes should be well-controlled. I recommend you share your surgical intentions with your Family Practitioner as they can be a valuable resource in optimizing your overall health.

Certain lifestyle or dietary changes may be helpful to improve the safety of your surgery. Any major weight loss is generally best performed prior to surgery. Smoking, while not an absolute contraindication to plastic surgery can certainly increase the risk of complications with specific procedures such as facelifts or tummy tucks. In these situations I usually recommend remaining nicotine-free for at least 6 weeks prior to surgery.

**Right Practitioner:** Is the surgeon qualified, experienced both in performance of the surgery but also in recognition and handling of complications?

Even the most unqualified practitioner can have a professional and authoritative website. Until recently, even non-surgeons could refer to themselves as "surgeons" and were under no obligation to include their area(s) of medical certification. Plastic surgeons will usually proudly display the designation, "Board-Certified", indicating successful completion of a surgical training program accredited by the Royal College of Surgeons of Canada. While such certification does not guarantee freedom from complications, it does provide assurance that the doctor has completed years of hands-on surgical training and passed rigorous examinations.

The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario (CPSO) is the regulatory body that oversees and grants medical licenses in Ontario. Do yourself a favour and make

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a quick visit to the CPSO website (<http://www.cpso.on.ca/docsearch/>). Here you can search the database of all medical practitioners in Ontario, review their training, qualifications, area of specialty certification, and any disciplinary actions. Also listed is any location where the surgeon has hospital admitting privileges, a fact that could become important in the event of an emergency.

Now that you have clarified the qualifications of the surgeon you will need to ensure they have experience with the actual procedure of interest. Relevant questions include:

- How many procedures of this type have you performed?
- How will complications be handled?
- Who will I contact if I have questions or concerns after going home?

During your consultation you should reflect on the rapport you develop with the surgeon. Having someone who you can trust and is approachable will be valuable in the event of a problem.

**Right Procedure(s):** Is the procedure itself safe?

Regardless of the actual procedure to be performed you and your surgeon should have an easy, frank discussion of potential risks, complications, and steps that could be taken to minimize them. You should not feel pressured to undergo procedure(s) that are more extensive or risky than you are willing to take-on.

Recent guidelines from the American Society of Plastic Surgeons suggest that lengthier surgical procedures increase the risk of certain problems, and require additional precautions in order to be performed safely. This information clashes with the message of mainstream television programs such as "Extreme Makeover" that promote the idea of long, multi-procedure cosmetic interventions in a single stage. While multiple procedures can often safely be performed in combination, be sure to ask your surgeon about alternative procedures that might shorten the length of surgery, or the value in splitting up a long procedure into shorter segments.

The type of anesthesia is another factor that may be flexible. Ask your surgeon if a

full general anesthesia is required or if local anesthesia, with or without sedation is an option. Either way your anesthetic should be supervised and monitored at all times by qualified personnel.

**Right Place:** Is the surgical facility safe and well-maintained?

The facility in which your surgery takes place can have a profound impact on the surgeon's ability to work safely or to respond effectively in the event of an emergency. Consequently it is important for you to learn about the place where the actual surgery will be performed. Common options include a public hospital, office-based procedure room, or ambulatory surgical facility.

In recent years there has been an increasing proportion of cosmetic plastic surgery procedures performed in office-based settings or ambulatory surgical facilities. For a number of reasons I expect that this trend will continue. While some of these facilities are more modern and better equipped than many public hospitals, the spectrum of quality and capabilities is vast. Thus, if your surgery is to take place in an office procedure room or ambulatory surgical facility some additional investigation is required.

While a comprehensive listing of facility safety features would be well beyond this article, a few basic questions should help you make an evaluation.

Is the facility accredited? The Canadian Association for Accreditation of Ambulatory Surgical Facilities (CAAASF) has comprehensive, stringent standards for facilities, equipment, and internal quality control. Centers with CAAASF accreditation will usually proudly display this fact.

What are the options for overnight accommodation? Who will attend to me overnight?

Have you ever had a major complication at this facility requiring transfer to a hospital?

What are the qualifications of the support staff, or those who will monitor my recovery?

The surgical facility should be clean, comfortable, and help put you at-ease. These features will inspire confidence, leav-



## Q & A with Dr. Charles Botbol

*Dr. Charles Botbol is a highly sought after Toronto dentist who has trained with some of the world's most prominent cosmetic and reconstructive dental specialists. Dr. Botbol has been featured on CTV'S Canada AM, CH Morning Live and 680 News. Email your questions to: [askanexpert@revivemagazine.ca](mailto:askanexpert@revivemagazine.ca)*

**Q: Why are Prep less porcelain veneers so popular?**

**A:** One of the hottest topics in dentistry today is "Prep less" or "Minimal Prep" Veneers. There are two primary reasons for the interest in this concept: 1) A major manufacturer is marketing Prep fewer veneers to the public creating widespread interest, and 2) it provides an opportunity to provide conservative aesthetics to those patients not desiring traditional aggressive tooth preparation.

**Q: Will prep less porcelain veneers look fake?**

**A:** The prep less option can certainly yield esthetics that rival traditionally prepped veneers. And, some people in dentistry believe that you cannot achieve a satisfying esthetic outcome using prep fewer veneers. But I have found that if you have a thorough knowledge of prep fewer veneers-when and how to use them-and follow several prerequisites, you can achieve a very attractive result. It is strongly advised you seek the

advice of a dentist who has had significant training and a practice that focuses on cosmetic dentistry.

**Q: What if my dentist doesn't do Lumineers?**

**A:** It is important to understand that "Prep less" or "minimal Prep" veneers are a technique, not a specific material. In the past few years, a dental manufacturer has been marketing directly to the public the concept of placing veneers without prepping the teeth: "no drilling, no shots, no pain, and no removal of tooth structure" For patients who are candidates for prep less veneers, the process can usually be completed within two appointments, with beautiful results. With prep less veneers, smiles can be brightened, spaces closed, straightened and reshaped to yield the desired smile. If need be, they can later be removed with a laser with minimal or no damage to the patient's teeth since no preparation was done.

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ing you relaxed and better able to cope with anxieties that will naturally accompany the anticipation of surgery.

**Right Price:** Is the price too-good-to-be-true?

The "right" price for your plastic surgery is not necessarily the lowest price. Naturally, no one would like to pay more for a product or service than they absolutely must. But shopping for plastic surgery services is very different from shopping for gasoline, in that the surgical treatments are not commodities that can be assumed identical regardless of their point of purchase.

With the above in mind, I strongly discourage any temptation to choose a sur-

geon, procedure or facility on the basis of price alone. Should you happen to find a surgeon who seems to offer a true bargain, do ask yourself the question, "Have any safety measures been overlooked in order to offer me this low price?"

This introduction to the Five P's of Plastic Surgery Safety should help you remember some basic factors influencing the safety of your surgical procedure and provide a framework for discussion during a consultation with the surgeon. For further safety information I suggest visiting the website of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, [www.plasticsurgery.org](http://www.plasticsurgery.org), just remember that all regulatory bodies in Canada will be different.

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