The 10 Most Common Plastic Surgery Complications

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Surgery is always a risk.

In 2013, Americans spent more than $7 billion on cosmetic surgery. From breast augmentation to rhinoplasty, procedures to change our appearance are becoming increasingly common. But these surgeries don't come without risks.

The 10 Most Common Plastic Surgery Complications

For many people, going under the knife is a very scary thought. If you're thinking about plastic surgery, it is important you are aware of both the benefits and the risks. Here are some of the most common and most talked about cosmetic surgery complications.

1. Hematoma
Hematoma is a pocket of blood that resembles a large, painful bruise. It occurs in 1-6 percent of breast augmentation procedures and is the most common complication after a facelift. Hematoma is a risk in nearly all surgeries, and treatment sometimes includes additional operations to drain the blood.

2. Nerve Damage
The potential for nerve damage is present in many different types of surgical procedures. Numbness and tingling are common after plastic surgery and can be signs of nerve damage. Most women experience a change in sensitivity following breast augmentation surgery and 15 percent permanently lose nipple sensation.
3. Infection

Though postoperative care includes steps to reduce the risk of infection, it remains one of the more common complications of plastic surgery. In breast surgeries, for instance, cellulitis (a skin infection) occurs in 2-4 percent of people. In some cases, infections can be internal and severe, requiring IV antibiotics.

4. Deep Vein Thrombosis and Pulmonary Embolism

Deep vein thrombosis (DVT) is a condition where blood clots form in deep veins, usually in the leg. When these clots break off and travel to the lungs, it's known as pulmonary embolism (PE). Though relatively uncommon, these complications can be fatal.

5. Scarring

Surgery typically results in some scarring. Since cosmetic surgery seeks to improve the way you look, scars can be particularly troubling. Hypertrophic scarring, for instance, is an abnormally red and thick raised scar that occurs after 2-5 percent of breast augmentation procedures.

6. General Appearance Dissatisfaction

Although most people are satisfied with their postoperative outcomes, disappointment with the results is a real possibility. People who undergo breast surgery may experience contouring or asymmetry problems, while those undergoing facial surgeries could simply not like the result.

7. Organ Damage

Liposuction can be traumatic for internal organs. Visceral perforations or punctures can occur when the surgical probe comes into contact with internal organs. Repairing these injuries can require additional surgery. The perforations may also be fatal.
8. Anesthesia Complications
Anesthesia is the practice that allows patients to undergo surgery without feeling the procedure. General anesthesia, where medication is used to make you unconscious, can sometimes lead to complications. These include lung infections, stroke, heart attacks, and death. More common anesthesia risks include waking up confused and disoriented, and shivering. A less common complication is anesthesia awareness, or waking up in the middle of surgery.

9. Seroma
Seroma is a condition that occurs when serum from your blood pools beneath the surface of the skin, resulting in swelling and pain. It looks like a large blister. This can occur after any surgery, and is the most common complication of a tummy tuck. Because seromas can become infected, they are often drained with a needle, effectively removing them, although there is a chance of recurrence.

10. Blood Loss
As with any surgery, some blood loss is expected. However, uncontrolled blood loss can lead to a drop in blood pressure with potentially deadly outcomes. Blood loss can happen while on the operating table, but also internally, after surgery.

The Takeaway
As with most surgeries, plastic surgery complications are more common in certain people. For instance, people who are obese and the elderly are more prone to complications.

You can reduce your risk of suffering these unwanted effects by fully vetting your doctor’s credentials and investigating the facility where your surgery will happen. Educating yourself about the procedure and possible risks, and discussing your concerns with your doctor will also help you manage your expectations and reduce the risk of complications.