Find your answer in 3 steps

by
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You might not be in charge of the auto industry, but where your own personal makeover is concerned, you have control over your own Big Three — three critical criteria for success: the right procedure, the right surgeon and the right “fit.”

1. THE RIGHT PROCEDURE
It might sound like a no-brainer, but deciding what you want to change is the first part of your Big Three — because it will drive the next two parts.

ITK advisor Dr. Joseph Niamtu explains that determining specifically what you want is imperative because that drives your choice of surgeon. The best surgeons are usually “super specialists” and concentrate on specific cosmetic procedures — faces, breasts, liposuction — Dr. Niamtu points out. “A surgeon that does primarily reconstructive procedures and ‘dabbles’ in cosmetics may not be the best choice, regardless of specialty or board certification.”

You can recruit the input of your potential surgeon in selecting your best procedure(s), but proceed with eyes wide open. The trick can be in judging if a physician is recommending procedures based on your needs, or recommending procedures based on his or her own preferences/specializations as a surgeon.

Dr. Michael Kluska, another ITK advisor, advises getting down to brass tacks. “Ask the prospective surgeon, ‘If this was your wife or daughter, what procedure would you do on her if she had the same complaint’ that you want to have treated?”

Our third editorial advisor, Dr. Joel Schlessinger, says when you’re seeking advice about procedures, expect to see — and receive advice from — the physician him or herself. Often, he says, “a lower level nurse or nonmedical person is in charge of booking and doing consults. They are incentivized and they waste no time in trying to up the bill,” and may make procedure recommendations based on that, not on what is best or most appropriate for you. Be sure that the procedure you’re considering is what you want, not what a physician or practice wants you to have.

2. THE RIGHT SURGEON
Once you decide on what you want to have done, you need to find the best physician to perform that procedure. But how?

“Word of mouth and pictures say the most about a doctor,” Dr. Schlessinger says. Talk to people you trust and ask whom they recommend — and then look at before and after pictures of your potential physician’s patients and the procedure you’re considering.

Dr. Niamtu concurs. “Most busy, competent surgeons have a significant volume of cases that are testaments to their work. Generally a busy surgeon with good outcomes will be popular by word of mouth.” And, he too points out that, a picture is worth a thousand words. “If a facelift surgeon can’t show you 50 before and after facelift pictures, something is not right.”

Dr. Kluska says you should also look at the photographic technique. “Look at the quality of the pictures. Are the before and after photos from the same point of view and angle?”

All photos should be taken with identical lighting, angles and posing of patients — “trick photography” can make results look more impressive than they are, so look for “transparency” and consistency in before and after photos.

And don’t necessarily settle for the first surgeon you visit, Dr. Kluska says. “Interview several doctors. After all, you will eventually be spending a lot of time with him. This is like dating. You wouldn’t date someone you don’t like. Make sure you like your surgeon as well.” Also, ask practical questions. “Ask how many years he has been in practice. Ask how many of these procedures he does,” Dr. Kluska says. “Research the surgeon on the Web, through the Better Business Bureau, etc.”

3. THE RIGHT “FIT”
You know what you want to have done, and you think you’ve found a great surgeon. Enter the third element of the Big Three — is it a good fit? What’s your gut tell you?

“It is important to know who you are going to, see their work when you go, and have a good feeling they are the one who will be doing your procedure,” Dr. Schlessinger says.

“We all know of excellent surgeons that have personalities like sour milk,” Dr. Niamtu adds, but even if a physician is a technical genius, “if you can’t speak to your surgeon, you may have the wrong surgeon.”

A busy practice is a sign of a good practice, but you should not feel like a component on an assembly line. “Being able to reach your surgeon easily is paramount,” Dr. Niamtu says. “When I give my cell phone number to patients they are usually blown away, as few surgeons exhibit that level of sincerity.”

So, do your homework — and make the Big Three work for you. It will put you solidly in the driver’s seat.