

WHAT'S UP? MEDIA

The Changing Face of Cosmetic Surgery

Dylan Roche | September 30, 2025



Have you ever worn makeup? Bought a gym membership? Chosen an outfit that makes you feel like a million bucks?

These are all questions that **Dr. Steven Williams**, recent president of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, asks whenever he hears skepticism about cosmetic surgery. And the reality is that modern culture is more receptive to this perspective than it was in the past, when there was a stigma of vanity or superficiality to getting any kind of work done. This is just one of the many ways the field of plastic surgery is rapidly changing—and will likely continue to change in the future.

“Aesthetic surgery isn’t about vanity. It’s about agency,” Williams says. “It’s about aligning how you feel with how you look—and doing it on your terms.”

As he puts it, we live in a world that scrutinizes appearances 24/7, and pretending that this doesn’t affect our confidence is like pretending Instagram doesn’t have filters. “The goal of good surgery isn’t to make someone look different,” he says. “It’s to make them feel like themselves, but better—rested, refined, more in control.”

But it’s not just about cultural perception. Plastic surgery today—not to mention the plastic surgery of the future—is able to accomplish more. “Both reconstructive and aesthetic plastic surgery today is faster, smarter, and more personalized than it was even a decade ago,” he says.

“Twenty years ago, the field was dominated by one-size-fits-all procedures, often with longer recovery times and more stigma of going under the knife.”

At the beginning of the year, the American Society of Plastic Surgeons predicted its biggest trends for 2025, and among them was the use of technology like 3-D imaging to help predict what a patient could look like by undergoing a procedure, as well as using a patient’s own platelets and fat to reduce the signs of aging or enhance their appearance. The forecast also noted, as Williams himself points out, more people want to focus on naturalism. Cosmetic surgery isn’t about completely changing a patient’s look but instead about small or subtle refinements.

It’s all enough to make you wonder: What does the future of cosmetic surgery look like? Are people still going to get the same procedures they always have, or will technology drastically change what doctors can accomplish? Moreover, how will a changing cultural acceptance of these surgeries influence what (and how much) people decide to get done?

With those questions in mind, here are five ways you might expect to see cosmetic surgery change in the next decade:

1. There will be less invasive techniques. When you think of cosmetic procedures, you might think of invasive surgeries that were popular in the past—rhinoplasty (a.k.a. nosejobs), rhytidectomy (a.k.a. facelifts), abdominoplasty (a.k.a. tummy tucks), and the like. Although these procedures are still done for a variety of reasons, there’s a growing trend toward less invasive procedures, such as injectables and lasers. Think Botox, dermal fillers, and ultrasound skin tightening. These have shorter recovery times and less risk, but they’re also less drastic in their appearance. Enhancements look refreshed, not transformed.

2. Tech will be influential. As with any field or industry, technical developments are always happening—and that includes the field of cosmetic surgery, which has seen a massive shift in technology and technique, according to Williams. “Imaging tools, easier and more available information about procedures, and better anesthesia techniques have made surgeries more accessible, safer, and more comfortable,” he says. “Because patients are more informed, they’re asking better questions. This is a savvier generation that’s not afraid to talk about their procedures — they want to partner in their care and social media has turbocharged this trend.”

3. There might be ethical concerns. While developing technology is a good thing, there are always ways in which it will be to the detriment of cosmetic surgery, and doctors and patients alike will have to proceed with caution. Social media and, more recently, A.I.-generated imagery have given people a distorted idea of what they’re supposed to look like, and they might turn to cosmetic procedures with unrealistic expectations. This puts the burden of setting expectations on the doctors.

“As AI-generated faces flood social media and patients arrive with filtered expectations, we’ll need to double down on real-world beauty, evidence-based care, and surgical integrity,” Williams says. “Because innovation without responsibility isn’t progress—it’s risk.”

Specifically, that risk is the mental health toll these unrealistic expectations have. “We’re in the uncanny valley of aesthetics—patients are chasing faces that don’t exist,” he continues. “As synthetic perfection floods the feed, the real challenge isn’t technique—it’s protecting mental

health while still delivering results that feel like an upgrade, not a cosplay. It will be a bigger issue as time marches us closer to more powerful and available A.I.-fueled realities and interactions.”

4. Fewer people will need weight-loss surgeries. Weight-management surgery used to be a solution for patients who struggled with obesity that couldn’t be controlled with diet and exercise alone. Gastric banding, stomach stapling, and gastric bypass were invasive procedures that carried high risk without guarantee of long-term results. Now the number of people seeking these surgeries is down by 20 percent, according to Columbia University’s Department of Surgery, because people have medication options instead.

As GLP-1 medicines like Ozempic and Wegovy become more commonplace, patients instead need different procedures to complement the weight loss they’ve achieved. “Ozempic didn’t just flatten blood sugar—it flattened demand for old-school weight loss surgery,” Williams explains. “Now we’re seeing an explosion in skin tightening, revision liposuction, and post-weight-loss contouring. Surgeons are stepping into the changes from effective weight loss tools being more widely available.”

5. Regenerative medicine will continue to evolve. Reconstructive surgery is more likely to be successful when doctors use cells grown from a patient’s own tissue, which can be used for skin grafts and wound healing. As stem cell biology, 3-D bioprinting, and tissue engineering becomes more advanced, so too will these innovative approaches—even letting doctors go from passive grafting to active tissue regeneration, rebuilding skin, cartilage, bone, and organs from autologous cells.

With more options and less stigma, the cosmetic surgery of the future opens up opportunities for everyday people to feel better about their appearance, and that’s something Williams sees as being crucial. “Study after study shows patients report improved self-esteem, reduced anxiety and even better social functioning after surgery—when done ethically and for the right reasons,” he says.

“It’s not about becoming someone else. It’s about becoming a version of yourself you can stop apologizing for.” He says this is especially true of people who might’ve avoided cosmetic procedures in the past, such as men, people of color, and nonbinary people.

And who would disagree that more confidence is ever a bad thing? It means better relationships, career success, and overall quality of life.

One final note: Williams notes that because cosmetic procedures are becoming more commonplace, noncertified providers are offering procedures. “Always seek out a board-certified plastic surgeon,” he says. “Board certification in plastic surgery isn’t some gold star for your surgeon’s ego wall. It’s a receipt that says: This surgeon trained for years, passed rigorous exams, operates in accredited facilities, and knows how to handle a complication when things don’t go as planned.”

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