

## Sculpting the body beautiful

These are some of the most common cosmetic surgery procedures that are offered by hospitals and clinics in Mumbai:

### BOTOX

The trade name of botulinum toxin, which when injected into specific points in the skin acts as a muscle relaxant, resulting in a tightening of the skin, thereby removing lines and wrinkles.

**Cost:** Rs250-500 a unit, depending on the hospital. A typical botox treatment for the entire face will cost Rs25,000-Rs50,000.

### FILLERS

These filling agents (for example, collagen) are injected into the skin to fill up grooves in the face and smoothen it.

**Cost:** Temporary fillers that last some six months cost about Rs15,000; permanent fillers that last up to 10 years can cost Rs30,000-Rs35,000.

### BLEPHEROPLASTY (EYELIDS)

This procedure involves removing excess fat and skin under and over the eyes through incisions.

**Cost:** Rs40,000-Rs50,000 (for all four eyelids).

### RHINOPLASTY (NOSE JOB)

This is all about reshaping the nose, its width and height, tip and nostrils. It can also help augment weak parts and reduce bumps and disproportionate parts.

**Cost:** Rs15,000-Rs30,000.

### RHYTIDECTOMY (FACELIFT)

This involves lifting up and separating different layers of the facial envelope, followed by tightening of different layers and removing excessive skin and fat.

**Cost:** A partial (or mid) facelift costs about Rs50,000; a full facelift can set you back by Rs60,000-Rs1 lakh (or even more).

### NECK LIFT

Here excess fat and skin is removed and the neck is contoured (it usually goes with a facelift).

**Cost:** Rs20,000 upwards.



— Getty Images

### LIPOSUCTION

This involves removing unwanted fat from different areas of the body through tiny incisions. It is for areas of the body where diet and exercise have failed to cut out fat.

**Cost:** Rs75,000-Rs1 lakh.

### ABDOMINOPLASTY (TUMMY TUCK)

Intended to remove extra skin and fat from the abdomen, as well as tighten the abdominal muscles and repair the gap between them; this usually goes with liposuction.

**Cost:** Rs50,000

### BREAST SURGERY

The aim is to alter the size and shape of breasts. A breast lift raises breasts and puts them in what is called an 'ideal' position. There is also male breast reduction.

**Cost:** Rs75,000-Rs1.5 lakh.

# core issue

16

### A man remade

No one's appearance has been changed by surgical intervention as much as pop superstar Michael Jackson's. The singer has undergone multiple surgeries to alter his nose, his forehead, his lips, his cheekbone and his chin.



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# Vanity fair



— Photolibrary

As cosmetic surgery goes mainstream, more and more Mumbaikars are buying bits and pieces of beauty. Aditi Seshadri on the booming business of nips and tucks, cuts and lifts

After his hard work paid off with a big, fat bonus last year, Vikram Sud indulged himself in an unusual way — he went out and saved his neck. "The skin around my neck had been sagging. It made me look older, real ugly, like a turkey," says the 31-year-old executive who works for a multinational bank in Mumbai. "I had been toying with the idea of cosmetic surgery. When I got some extra cash, I went for it."

There are an increasing number of people like Sud in Mumbai — young and old, women and men, girls and boys — with the money, the access and the burning inclination to get through surgery and other medical interventions what, they believe, has been denied them by nature: an improved look.

The procedure Sud used, which involves tightening the skin around the neck area, costs upwards of Rs25,000. But, says Sud, you can't put a price on the boost his confidence has received since the operation. "Surgery might seem like an extreme solution, but what's wrong with that?"

Nothing at all, it seems, according to the incidental experience of cosmetic surgeons and other doctors across Mumbai. Rising incomes, the mushrooming of cosmetic surgery procedures and their falling costs, the acceptance factor among family and friends, and the eternal fascination with enhancing one's beauty — all of these are combining to take cosmetic surgery and its many cousins from a niche industry that catered to "filmy types" to main-street business.

"In the last three years, the number of Mumbaikars undergoing cosmetic surgery has increased by 300-400 per cent," says Dr Mohan Thomas, director of the Cosmetic Surgery Institute, Bandra. "This industry is worth about Rs30-Rs50 crore a year in Mumbai. The figure for India could be as high as Rs200-Rs300 crore a year. And business is expected to double in 2007."

Dr Debraj Shome, a plastic surgeon with Aditya Jyot Eye Hospital, Wadala, says that Mumbai constitutes "some 50 per cent" of the total Botox usage in the entire country. Other experts have similar growth stories to tell about the burgeoning cosmetic surgery business.

Driving these numbers is the growing acceptability that it is OK to change the face and the body you were born with. Most importantly, cosmetic surgery has become more accessible and less intimidating, in terms of cost as well as techniques employed.

"We have only one life and I want to live it to the fullest," says Kamal Kumar, a 50-year-old general manager who bought himself a facelift six weeks ago. "If I can look 30 when I'm 90, I will. Also, cosmetic surgery is really affordable these days, even for the middle class. Now my wife also wants to get it done."

Many see cosmetic surgery as an 'investment', like Tia Sharma (name changed), a 37-year-old schoolteacher who had a partial facelift two months ago. "It cost about Rs55,000; that's not even a month's salary," she says. "It's worth it — completely."

Besides the cost, Sharma was also attracted by the ease of the procedure. "Traditional facelifts left big scars around the face and needed an average of about six weeks in recovery time," explains Dr Shome. But these days, there are more options, more refined and minimally invasive techniques that translate into smaller scars and briefer recovery periods.

Says cosmetic consultant Shalini Desai (name changed), who had Botox injected to make her smile less gummy: "It took only two injections, 15-20 minutes, and the effect was almost immediate." Dr Thomas calls "minimal-access cosmetic surgery" the key to the growing popularity of many beauty-enhancement treatments.

The larger clientele was, and continues to be, women — young girls wanting to look better (especially before marriage) and older women yearning to look younger — with nose jobs, facelifts, breast surgeries, liposuction and tummy tucks being the most common procedures sought.

Men are joining the rush, but not always through the front door. "Fifty per cent of my patients are men," says Dr Shome. "Many are closet users; they come in for Botox treatments but don't tell their wives." Breast reduction surgery, removal of hip bulges and surgical hair transplants are some of the other common procedures popular with Mumbai's men.

Dr Thomas points to another, potentially alarming, trend. "More teenagers, boys and girls, are coming in for cosmetic surgery," he says. "Sometimes they come in on their own, but they're usually brought by pushy parents who want to prepare them for marriage or a lucrative career in showbiz."

No age group wants, it seems, to miss out on the benefits cosmetic surgery can deliver. Many older people, with kids settled and money to burn, are turning to body and face contouring. A small number is also having genital enhancement surgery: vaginal tightening and penile enhancement.

Business is booming like never before in an industry based on wants rather than needs, and prospects for the future look more than rosy. Better still, there is unlikely to be a shortage of customers in a world where you can never be too thin, too young or too beautiful.

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## Many bumps on the way to better looks

### DNA Correspondent

With the growing acceptance of cosmetic surgery comes a gathering voice of concern — about botched-up operations, spurious promises and lack of accountability.

"One-third of my practice involves redoing other people's crap," says Dr Mohan Thomas, of the Cosmetic Surgery Institute, Bandra. "The industry is filled with doctors making bogus claims and unsuspecting patients getting into trouble. There is a lack of experience and finesse."

Adds Dr Debraj Shome, who is attached to the Aditya Jyot Eye Hospital, Wadala: "More and more doctors are getting into cosmetic surgery because it is lucrative. But, unfortunately, many are

not trained properly." This is one reason for the growing incidence of messed-up procedures — largely with face, nose and tummy jobs — which put the patient's health in danger and, in the process, ruin their looks and demoralise morale.

"I find many doctors doing multiple procedures at the same time," says Dr Thomas. "A doctor has failed if something goes wrong and he can't figure out what made it go wrong, or if he needs someone to correct the problem."

Patients are seen by many cosmetic surgeons as cash cows, with the result that doctors nod their eyes to procedures that people could well do without. "Often the problem is psychological," says Mumbai surgeon Dr Sunil Keswani. "A woman wants her breasts enhanced in

the hope that her husband will find her attractive and come back to her. But that's not going to happen."

Quite a few of those seeking cosmetic surgery have body dysmorphic disorder, a psychological condition where people have a distorted image of their bodies. "These people need psychiatric treatment, not cosmetic surgery," says Dr Keswani.

"It's difficult to verify credentials in India and there is little accountability," says Dr Shome. The only way to check this, says Dr Thomas, is for doctors to be assessed internationally, and by enhancing their range of knowledge. They can do this, he adds, by meeting peers, addressing meetings and publishing papers in international journals.

# My breast surgery has done wonders for my morale

### Sheena Prasad

Having a great body is important to me, not just because I'm an actress trying to make a mark in an industry where looks mean the world, but also because I'm a woman.

Being attractive is a positive qualification — doors open easily and it also helps boost my confidence. When I joined the entertainment jamboree I did feel the need to alter a few things about my appearance. So I decided to get silicone implants to enhance my breasts.

Biases against cosmetic surgery are vanishing; attitudes have undergone a sea change. People no longer treat you like a freak when you propose something like a breast enhancement. I had the full support of my parents, who

weren't the slightest bit apprehensive about the procedure. In fact, it was they who paid the Rs1.5-lakh bill.

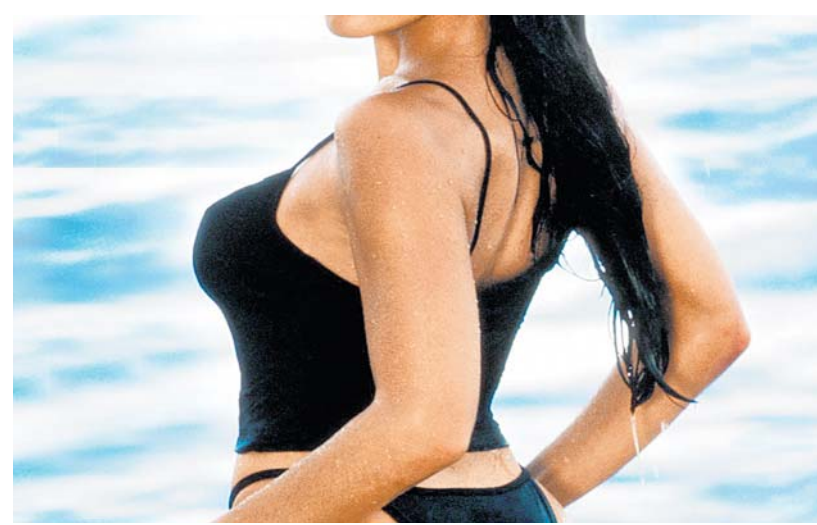
I began my research by talking to friends and colleagues and reading up about implants, much of it on the net. I soon realised that showbiz people aren't the only ones opting for cosmetic surgery; I met several women in regular jobs who had got a nose job or silicone implants or liposuction.

Another change with cosmetic surgery is the ease of access, both in terms of cost, which has gone down, and the availability of good surgeons, latest technology and treatments. While researching the procedure I wanted, I came across a lot of information about reputed doctors, the many methods available and where one can get them done.

But everything is not rosy. Sometimes doctors do not give you the full picture. That's what happened with me. My doctor did not tell me about the precautions I would have to take, or the possible side effects of the surgery. He told me the procedure was a minor one and that I could get back to work almost immediately after it.

And that's what I did, going for an audition the day after my surgery, only to return home with the stitches having opened up. To add to my woes, my face got swollen and I had a rash all over my chest.

This wasn't what I had expected. I underwent surgery three more times, over a five-month period, because there was one problem or the other. Besides, I also had to take lots of painkillers, antibiotics and other med-



icines. Looking back, I think I could have avoided all this if the doctor had told me everything I needed to know the first time round.

Surgery has left some scars, but I'm told those will disappear soon. I'm certain I don't want to go under the surgeon's scalpel for aesthetic reasons ever again. But there is no denying that since my stitches were removed — it happened last Sunday — I have been looking good.

I really do feel very upbeat, despite all the troubles I had to go through. The surgery has done wonders for my morale; I am more beautiful. And that counts for a lot.

Prasad, 24, an aspiring actress, spoke to Sanghamitra Bhoymik. Sheena Prasad is a pseudonym