



Extreme Makeovers

By George Bitar M.D., Board Certified Plastic Surgeon

We have all seen on TV the shows "Extreme Makeovers" or "The Swan", whether we have admitted it to our friends or not. The concept is, without a doubt, fascinating: Take someone with average or below average looks and transform them into an attractive man or woman.

As a cosmetic surgeon, I believe these shows have good intentions, open doors that otherwise would have remained closed, and allow the average person to dream a little. Those are the positives. The negatives outweigh the positives. Anything in excess could be dangerous. Nowhere is this truer than in cosmetic surgery. Doing multiple operations on someone could set unrealistic expectations. Changing the outside, no matter how drastic in such a short period of time, does not change the inside. Psychological problems may be masked by a good surgical result, but they may not be solved. Furthermore, the risk of complications goes up with unjustifiably long surgeries.

So, what's my solution? I do extreme makeovers. However, I conduct them strategically addressing areas such as the face, breasts, limbs and abdomen with six months between operations. I may do a complete makeover on a person in 3 different operations over an 18 months period, as opposed to doing it all in one day. For example, I'll do a tummy tuck and thigh lifts in one operation, breast and arm lifts in a second operation and facelift in a third operation with the operative times ranging from 1-6 hours. I feel it is safer that way. This allows the patient and surgeon to assess the objectives periodically as the work is in progress. More importantly, it allows the patient time to adjust to the cosmetically enhanced body parts gradually and not get shocked all at once. It is true that this way a patient is subjected to anesthesia multiple times, multiple operations, and multiple recovery times but the quality of each procedure is better. I still believe that doing an extreme makeover gradually will give the same end result. It may take longer, and may be more cumbersome, but it is safer.

As far as the dieting, exercise, cosmetic dentistry, hair stylists, wardrobe changes, they all enhance the outcome, but that too can be done gradually and achieve slow and steady progress that creates a change in both appearance, and more importantly attitude. This method may not make the ratings, but it makes my patients very happy, and I am convinced they will adopt this new lifestyle for the better, because they have had ample time to contemplate and adjust.

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Bitar Cosmetic Surgery Institute, 3023 Hamaker Court. # 109 Fairfax, VA. 22031 · Phone: 703.206.0506
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