

GET READY FOR THE ZOOM BOOM



Zoom calls, masks, and quarantine weight gain will fuel demand for cosmetic surgery. What's it mean for you?

BY NAREN ARULRAJAH

Many shuttered aesthetic practices struggled to survive the lockdown, and then they had another concern. Would patients come back when the doors re-opened? People were learning to do without key services and developing DIY alternatives. With a recession looming, cosmetic surgeons braced for a coming drought.

But this drought never came. In fact, demand for aesthetic procedures has actually soared. There are a few reasons why.

Zoom. Professional meetings and social gatherings moved online, often via Zoom or a similar video conferencing platform. The ability to see virtual companions is intended to simulate physical meetings. However, users also see themselves. Few people have film studios in their homes. Instead, interactions are conducted via low resolution cameras in poor lighting conditions.

Video calls typically last several minutes or even hours, and nervous participants spend a disproportionate amount of that time gazing at their own images. What happens when people spend hours every week studying unflattering self-images? An increase in requests for plastic surgery, of course.

The mask effect. Today we only see half a face, because the other half is literally masked. Smiles are hidden, while frown lines are on full display. From eye lifts to forehead contouring, people will be looking for ways to improve their upper face.

One of the most obvious consequences is an increase in demand for Botox. Some patients requested it at their homes even during the height of the lockdown. Since that wasn't safe or even legal in most areas, expect a serious backlog that will continue while masks remain in force.

#Quarantine15. Staying home means constant access to the pantry and refrigerator, with no access to the gym. Elevated stress means comfort food. Excess time means more experimentation in the kitchen. The predictable result is weight gain, which became fodder for jokes, memes, and the popular hashtag #Quarantine15.

While Zoom may highlight facial imperfections, it hides love handles and muffin tops. Now, as people prepare to venture back into the physical world this weight gain may need to be addressed.

The top five procedures that patients are expressing an interest in are:

- Neurotoxin injections

- Breast augmentation
- Dermal fillers
- Liposuction
- Abdominoplasty

The above list closely resembles pre-pandemic trends. However, abdominoplasty did not make the top five list in 2019. Its sudden popularity likely foreshadows a rise in other surgical and nonsurgical body sculpting procedures as people face the effects of weight gain during lockdown.

FIRST, DO NO HARM

People are eager for some semblance of normalcy, but one question looms large: "Is it safe?" Although many people are ready to resume aesthetic treatments, they want to do so carefully. Expect a growing percentage of treatment plans to begin with a virtual consultation. According to a recent member survey conducted by the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, about two-thirds of practices have seen an increase in telehealth visits, and this trend shows no signs of disappearing.

An in-depth global consumer survey, commissioned by Cynosure, also provides some valuable insights. Nearly a third of those surveyed intend to return to aesthetic practices as quickly as possible, and 85 percent plan to return within a year. More than half named COVID-19 as a top concern. When asked what would make them feel confident in the safety of treatment, the top answers were:

- Staff members wearing masks and gloves
- Masks required of all patients in the reception area
- Uncrowded offices, with a limited number of people present at any given time
- Clear and reassuring communication from the practice regarding safety protocols

Keep safety in mind as you reopen your doors and get ready for the Zoom boom. ■

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