

# COVID-19 isn't stopping people from going under the knife

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The spread of COVID-19 has deterred people from doing lots of things, but going under the knife for cosmetic surgery doesn't seem to be one of them.

Cosmetic surgeons across the region have reported a steady flow of patients since they were permitted to resume invasive and non-invasive procedures in May. Some have even noticed an uptick in clients clamoring for a post-quarantine makeover or seeking skin treatments to address "maskne"—acne around the mouth and jaw caused by wearing a face mask.

"We had a 90% increase in cosmetic consults from mid-May to the present and a 75% increase in new patients," said Ella Antimarino, director of marketing and business development for Bellissimo Plastic Surgery & Medi Spa. It has locations in Monroeville and Shadyside and satellite offices in Cranberry, Greensburg, Robinson and Hopewell.

Ms. Antimarino and her husband, plastic surgeon Dr. Jeffrey R. Antimarino, used the mandated shutdown to put finishing touches on the practice's new aesthetics center.

"We've been doing a lot of tweak-ments," which Ms. Antimarino described as minor tweaks often involving lasers or skin procedures with micro needling. Demand for body contouring and combination procedures—ones involving more than one part of the body—also has been steady, Dr. Antimarino said.

"With the downtime and being shut down from work and outside experiences, we think people really ended up focusing on themselves. It's one area of their life they can control," Ms. Antimarino said.

The fact that many people are still working from home has motivated some to move forward with liposuction, fillers and the like—without their colleagues knowing.

"Most of the things we do have very little downtime," said Dr. Leo McCafferty, a cosmetic, plastic and reconstructive surgery specialist

with offices in Shadyside and Mt. Lebanon. "Specifically if it's below the neck, you could be theoretically on a Zoom or video conference call the next day."

Even face masks have given some of his patients an extra boost of confidence, including one who went to the grocery store just a couple days after a face lift.

"She didn't have much bruising, but she wasn't embarrassed to go out even with stitches because she had a [face mask](#) on," Dr. McCafferty said.

At The Skin Center, a medical spa and [cosmetic surgery](#) center with offices across Pennsylvania and Ohio, clients have been requesting services to address fine lines and wrinkles spotted during Zoom conferences.

"Video calls are not the most flattering to see yourself on," said Kirstie Ansell, The Skin Center's director of marketing. "So many of our patients reached out to us saying they couldn't stop staring at the wrinkles on their forehead or their double chin."

For 32-year-old Kelly D. of Upper St. Clair, who requested her last name be withheld, The Skin Center's Mt. Lebanon office for Botox injections was one of the first places she went after coronavirus restrictions relaxed for medical spas in Allegheny County.

"I am a young mom. After being stuck in the house for three months, it's important that you do something for you," she said. "I think it's important to take care of yourself more than ever."

Going in for a consultation or procedure looks a little different these days. Most now require temperature checks upon arrival, masks, a

touchless check-in process and changes in waiting rooms. If you recently traveled to a state where COVID-19 infections are on the rise, expect to be asked to delay your appointment for at least 14 days.

"I was completely alone in the waiting room. ... It gives you peace of mind," Kelly said about her experience at The Skin Center. "They got me out as quickly as possible" but still maintained "that friendly nature of the appointment."

Many surgeons also used virtual consultations to keep foot traffic in their offices to a minimum. At Beleza Plastic Surgery & Med Spa, with offices in Sewickley and Downtown, Dr. Anna Wooten invites prospective patients to upload photos of their areas of concern and complete a medical history questionnaire.

"It's basically like a secure, HIPAA-compliant FaceTime," said administrative coordinator Anastasia Wooten. "Now people can have their consult face to face with the doctor, but they can be sitting in the living room. Telehealth has leaped forward leaps and bounds."

At Dr. McCafferty's office, patients aren't permitted to bring guests with them for their consultations for now, but they can join the conversation from home via a video conferencing platform.

"It's always nice to have another set of ears listening, someone you trust," he said. "The hardest thing is to not shake hands with someone."

Dr. Antimarino encouraged virtual consultations when his office first reopened, but now he's back to seeing many clients in person.

"When I sit in a room with somebody face to face, I can really bond with them and get a feel for what their motivation is," he said, as well as get a better sense of their skin texture, muscle tone and concerns. "I think it's

very difficult, at least for me, to do that across a computer screen."

Patient rooms are thoroughly sanitized and left empty for at least 10-15 minutes before another person is brought in, he noted.

While these extra precautions required planning and adjustments, they were mostly enhancements to the cleaning and safety practices already in place in most plastic surgeons' offices, they said.

"We are really excited to be back in a safe way," Ms. Wooten said. "We love seeing our patients, and we love seeing them healthy and happy."

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