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The Rise of the Over-40 Nose Job

BY JOLENE EDGAR



Featuring Adam Kolker, MD, FACS, a double board-certified plastic surgeon in New York City.

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Some of the other surgeons I spoke with estimate that the 40-plus set comprises closer to 15% or 20% of rhinoplasty cases, but “that’s definitely more than I did five years ago,” says **Adam Kolker, MD, a board-certified plastic surgeon in New York City.**



A 46-year-old patient before her rhinoplasty... Courtesy of Dr. Adam R. Kolker



... and after surgery. Courtesy of Dr. Adam R. Kolker

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Why now? Behind the rise of midlife rhinoplasties

Back in the day, rhinoplasty—plastic surgery, in general—had certain geographic strongholds, like Los Angeles and New York City, but it wasn't nearly as ubiquitous as it is today. Even if someone was embarrassed by their nose—because bullying, unlike selfies, is not a 21st-century invention—the idea of cosmetic surgery may have felt foreign, scary, or extravagant. And, so, “they put it off for years,” **Dr. Kolker** says.

While the stigma around plastic surgery has faded, nose jobs are still strongly associated with the awkward toll of puberty.

Sometimes the nose itself doesn't fluctuate all that much, but it can appear more prominent as the cheeks deflate and sag, and the chin begins to recede. (Nose jobs and chin implants have long gone hand-in-hand for this very reason.) For women, the hormonal shifts of menopause can “very significantly affect skin elasticity and soft tissue quality as well as bone density, to an extent,” notes **Dr. Kolker**, all of which “can change how the nose sits in the context of the face.”

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Likewise, **Dr. Kolker** does rhinoplasty as a standalone procedure, since he feels it demands his “undivided attention.”

The “non nose-job nose job”

Bolstering an aging nose and enhancing breathing generally means “deploying more cartilage grafts for structural support, especially to reinforce weakened areas of cartilage,” notes **Dr. Kolker**. It means augmenting rather than reducing the nose. But my sources say more patients, men and women both, are comfortable with stronger noses—profiles that have some presence—particularly when they align with their personal or cultural identity.

“I watched my face get more structured as I got older, and my nose seemed to stand out more.”

Many are actually “terrified of looking like someone else,” adds **Dr. Kolker**. This rings especially true for those who have children.

Before 46-year-old Lori got a rhinoplasty with **Dr. Kolker** she told him, “I’m only looking for a subtle refinement. Nothing dramatic. Just my nose, only better.” He understood the assignment. “I’m not sure my parents even noticed when I saw them a few months [after the surgery],” she says. (She’d kept them in the dark because “they’re not really open-minded about cosmetic procedures.”)

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The best rhinoplasty surgeons will actually insist on conservative, less-is-more adjustments for older patients, whose sense of self is fully formed. “At an emotional level, an overdone nose can mean an identity crisis,” **Dr. Kolker** warns.

Upsides of an over-40 nose job

What’s more, rhinoplasty techniques have evolved alongside aesthetic preferences. “Huge, paradigm shifts have happened over the last 30 or 40 years,” **Dr. Kolker** says. Surgeons today generally aim to preserve as much natural tissue as possible, so as not to completely upend the original anatomy, which can destabilize the nose.

“You know who you are and what you like, so we’re not operating on a target that might change.”

While the main risks associated with rhinoplasty—bruising, swelling, poor scarring, bleeding, infection, asymmetries, breathing difficulties—are largely the same at every age, older patients, with their penchant for subtlety, may very well avoid what **Dr. Kolker** calls the most significant risk of a nose job: looking like you’ve had one.