

# Nip, Tuck and Duck!

You've recently gone under the knife for some "enhancements." Are your friends allowed to notice? And should you own up? *By Ann Hodgman*

I'VE HAD SO MUCH PLASTIC SURGERY that—cosmetically speaking—I'm bionic. I've had a chin implant and facial liposuction, plus lipo in a few other places, and seven years' worth of Botox, and a couple of things that my famous discretion prevents me from mentioning. And thousands of dollars later, I look exactly 3 percent better.

But that 3 percent was enough to catch the attention of a college friend I ran into some time ago. "You look different, Ann," she said, peering at me like someone searching for a contact lens on the beach. "What happened?"

Since I hadn't seen her in a long while, I didn't feel I owed her an explanation. "Just the ravages of time." I answered vaguely wishing I had the guts to ask what had happened to her hair color over the years. But if she had been a closer friend, I would have told her the truth without embarrassment. In fact, if she had been a good friend, I would have told her even before I'd had the procedures done. Being at an age when everyone scrutinizes everyone else's face for signs of "work," I'd rather cut, so to speak, to the chase. If my acquaintances want to scrutinize me, they might as well know what they're looking at.

Unfortunately, surgical techniques have evolved faster than society's norms for discussing them. What should you do, for example, when someone's new breasts suddenly require you to stand six inches farther away? Clearly, cosmetic-surgery etiquette needs to be standardized.

Are you supposed to alert your coworkers to the fact that the next time they see you, they shouldn't mention that you have two black eyes?

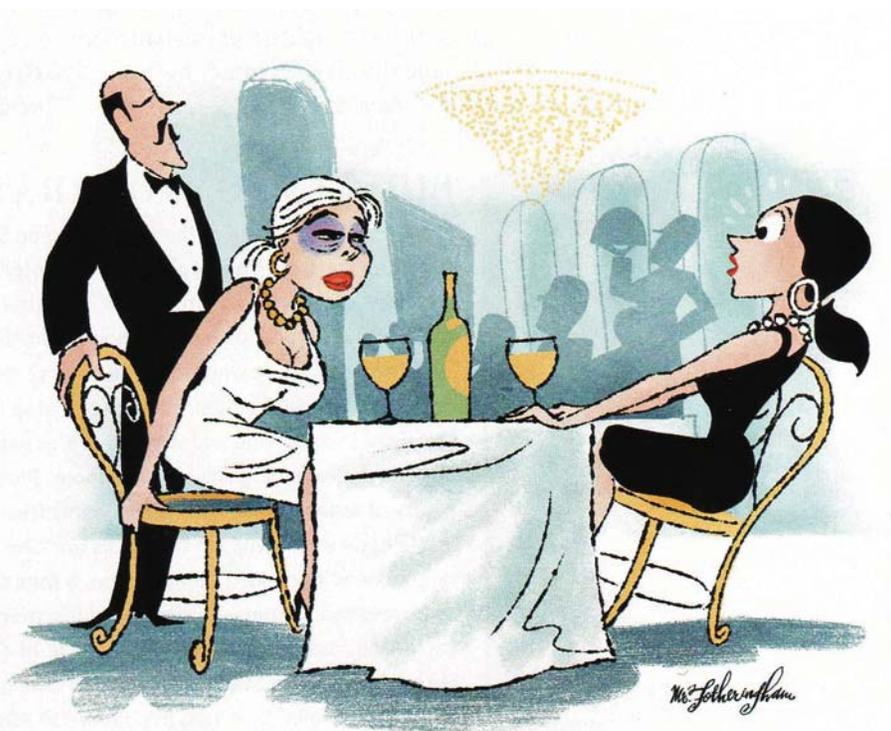
And what if a friend asks you, "Do you think I need a face-lift?" Here, it's best to follow the First Principle of Cosmetic-Surgery Conversation: Treat it like weight loss. After all, you

would never tell a friend she needed to lose weight. (For the sake of convenience, I'm going to assume that all the friends in this discussion are female.) You wouldn't blurt out, "And how!" if she asked you if she was fat. And if she'd lost a few pounds, you'd say "You look great!" instead of "You look thinner!" At least, I hope you'd say that. You don't want your friend to suspect that you've been monitoring her appearance, do you?

So when she asks you the face-lift question, it's best to spit out your coffee and sputter, "What are you talking about?" Then, when your friend gets specific and points to her jawline, you say: "I don't see a problem. But if it bothers you—well, it's your face." If she's a very close friend, you can venture slightly closer to the truth: "I guess I see what you mean, but I would never have noticed it on my own."

A certain amount of polite dishonesty is also required post-surgery. Unless a friend has actually told you that she was going to have a procedure done, you shouldn't comment on any changes you notice. No one wants or needs to hear any compliment on her appearance that suggests, "You looked terrible before you made the change."

Should you feel guilty about padding the truth? Of course not. Certain lies are important to keep our social lives running smoothly. Take, for example, the Bad-Boyfriend Lie. Your friend asks, "Should I dump him?" Even if you hate the "him" in question, you would never say: "Yes. He's an idiot." If she doesn't leave



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him—or if she leaves him and then takes him back—your friendship will be marred forever. Same with plastic surgery. Presurgery, don't tell her she needs anything done; postsurgery, don't make a huge deal about the improvement.

What if you're the patient? As I guess my own example suggests, I think it's fine to tell people you've had plastic surgery. Many of your listeners are probably considering plastic surgery themselves, and they'll be interested in hearing what you've been through. But if you're dissatisfied with the results, please don't ask people to join you in your dissatisfaction. In an apartment building where my husband and I once lived, we had a neighbor who worked as a receptionist for a plastic surgeon. As a birthday present, her boss treated her to a nose job. Unfortunately, the new nose had a horrible gouge down the center. One day, when my husband was in the elevator with this woman, she told him the free-surgery story. Then she got closer and thrust her nose right under his eyes. "Can you believe he did this to me?" she cried.

Almost any direction my poor trapped husband could have gone in would have been insulting. "What a tragedy!... No, wait, I think the surgeon did a good job.... No, wait, at least you look more interesting...." All he could really do was hope that the elevator would crash.

Even more troublesome are the people who draw your attention to their changed appearance and then lie about it. My dermatologist, Alicia Zalka, has collected a list of such lies, which include: "My dentist was a little rough with my

## IT'S FINE TO SAY...

- "You look fantastic."
- "I'm going to have a facelift, and I'm so excited that I'm telling everyone."
- "I would never have noticed."
- "Ooooooh, what was it like?" (People love to talk about their operations.)

## BUT DON'T ASK...

- "Would you say that I'm flat - chested?"
- "Did you know they've made big advances in liposuction."
- "Why the bandages?"
- "Have you operated on anyone famous?"
- "You look so relaxed. Were you on vacation?" (Code for "What have you had done?")

cleaning," "I fell asleep with my BlackBerry on my pillow" and, my favorite, "I hit my eye with my hair dryer." As most people know, two black eyes are a sign of a nose job; two black eyes are also impossible to ignore. A person who ventures out in public with a couple of shiners and decides to tell everyone, "I had my deviated septum fixed," is begging to be gossiped about.

I want to put in a word about the doctors who make all this angst possible. Plastic surgeons and dermatologists often find that mentioning their professions in social settings invites inappropriate nagging. "People constantly ask if I think they need Botox," says Zalka. "About 85 percent of the time I haven't noticed any problem." Most doctors have evolved their own useful responses. Darrick Antell, a New York City plastic surgeon, told me that he always says no when someone asks if she needs a cosmetic procedure. "No one needs any of this," he says. But what if he meets a couple at a party and the wife asks, "Don't you think my husband should have his eyelids done?"

"Then I'm stuck," Antell admits. "I usually chuckle and say that I think he looks pretty good, but when he's ready, he'll know whom to call."

Such stock answers are an important part of being polite. But there are times when it's even more polite to recall that not everything needs to be talked about.

When the subject is cosmetic surgery, the most important rule—the only rule that covers every situation—is "Think before you speak."

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