

Researchers Say Some Patients Stop Antidepressants After Plastic Surgery

Reviewed by Louise Chang, MD

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Cosmetic Surgery Can Boost Mood

Oct. 9, 2006 -- Having cosmetic surgery (https://web.archive.org/web/20160819044249/http://www.webmd.com/beauty/treatments/default.htm) won't magically change your life, but it could improve your mood and your quality of life; it also might help you quit taking antidepressant medications (https://web.archive.org/web/20160819044249/http://www.webmd.com/depression/depression-medications-antidepressants)medications (https://web.archive.org/web/20160819044249/http://www.webmd.com/drugs/index-drugs.aspx).

Those are the findings of two separate studies presented at the American Society of Plastic Surgeons Plastic Surgery (https://web.archive.org/web/20160819044249/http://www.webmd.com/skin-beauty/guide/skin-beauty-plastic-surgery) 2006 conference in San Francisco.

"The effect of cosmetic surgery (https://web.archive.org/web/20160819044249/http://www.webmd.com/beauty/treatments/ss/slideshow-cosmetic-surgery) could be strong enough to help people get off antidepressant (https://web.archive.org/web/20160819044249/http://www.webmd.com/depression/antidepressants-9/slideshow-antidepressants) medications," says Bruce Freedman, MD, a plastic surgeon in the Washington, D.C. area, who led one study.

In the other study, women who had surgery to correct asymmetrical breasts (https://web.archive.org/web/20160819044249/http://www.webmd.com/women/picture-of-the-breasts) reported a better quality of life and higher self-esteem six months after the surgery, says Elvio Bueno Garci'a, MD, PhD, a professor at the Federal University of Sao Paulo, Brazil, who led the study.

Cosmetic Surgery and Antidepressants

Freedman and his colleagues evaluated 362 men and women, most of them middle-aged women, who had undergone cosmetic surgeries such as facelifts, breast augmentation (https://web.archive.org/web/20160819044249/http://www.webmd.com/beauty/breast-implants/cosmetic-procedures-breast-augmentation), breast reduction (https://web.archive.org/web/20160819044249/http://www.webmd.com/beauty/breast-reduction/breast-reduction), and tummy tucks (https://web.archive.org/web/20160819044249/http://www.webmd.com/drugs/2/drug-7075/tucks+topical/details). Before their surgeries, 301 patients (83%) were not taking antidepressants; the other 61 patients (17%) were taking the medications.

Why did he do the study? "A lot of people are concerned about adverse effects from antidepressants," Freedman tells WebMD. "We were looking to see if cosmetic surgery (https://web.archive.org/web/20160819044249/http://www.webmd.com/beauty/treatments/rm-quiz-cosmetic-surgery) alone would impact people's decisions [to stay on or quit the medications]."

The two groups, he says, were similar in age, sex (https://web.archive.org/web/20160819044249/http://www.webmd.com/sex-relationships/default.htm), and types of surgery performed. Six months after the surgery, 19 of the 61 patients on antidepressants had stopped the medication, a decrease of 31%.

Fifteen (5%) of the 301 patients that weren't taking antidepressants before the surgery began to take them within six months after they had surgery; Freedman says that figure is consistent with what would be expected in the general population.

"You could theoretically claim they stopped and started [antidepressants] due to other stressors," Freedman says. For instance, a patient may have been on antidepressants before surgery to ease his feelings of grief (https://web.archive.org/web/20160819044249/http://www.webmd.com/mental-health/mental-health-coping-with-grief), which then subsided enough to stop the medication.

But Freedman says he ruled out this possibility by questioning all patients before and after the surgery about major life stressors such as divorce and death in the family. No major life changes were identified that may have played a role in the patients' decisions about antidepressants, he says.

Self-esteem was boosted all around, he found; 99% of those not taking antidepressants before surgery and 98% of those who did take antidepressants before surgery cited better self-esteem.

