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# Health & Body

By: Dr. Carlos Burnett

Over the past few years, there has been an undeniable increase in African Americans, women specifically, electing to undergo plastic surgery. For African American patients, the most important things to remember when choosing a cosmetic procedure and a plastic surgeon are the unique characteristics of their skin type. Think of your surgery as an investment. When you are about to make any big-ticket purchase, you assess risks vs. rewards, do the research and consider the projected outcome before making your final decision. Investing in a cosmetic procedure should follow those same guidelines.

**Risk vs. Reward** – Every patient is different — as is each surgical procedure. Risks specifically associated with African American patients can range from vitamin D deficiency, which can affect how wounds heal; to keloid scar formation, which African Americans are 16% more likely to have (About.com); to more threatening complication risks such as hypertensive crisis, if large volumes of local anesthesia are used.

**Research** – This is, quite possibly, the most important step of the surgery process. Selecting a plastic surgeon should not be a fly-by-night decision — you are trusting this individual to alter your appearance. Your first order of business is to confirm that the surgeon is board certified. The next questions you need to address are:

- Does the surgeon have experience working with ethnic skin and, more specifically, your skin type?
- Does the surgeon understand your ethnic identity?
- Where does he/she perform procedures?
- Does the surgeon have the three pillars for successful surgery: affordability, availability and ability?
- Are you comfortable with the surgeon, the practice and your decision to proceed with the procedure?

**Projected Outcome** – When considering a cosmetic procedure, the main thing to ask yourself is: Why? What is the driving force behind your need for the change? Are you seeking to camouflage your ethnicity — and, if so, will this procedure really help you to realize your goals? There is always the possibility of scarring: will you be able to tolerate the scar to achieve the eventual outcome? Can you deal with the social downtime during your recovery time? If you can truthfully answer these questions, then you will have an easier time making the decision to undergo a surgery.

Dr. Carlos Burnett is Board Certified by the American Board of Plastic Surgery and is a fellow of The American College of Surgeons. Dr. Burnett specializes in treating patients who have skin and body characteristics that are unique to their race. [burnettplasticsurgery.com](http://burnettplasticsurgery.com).

