



RHINOPLASTY

Patient information

 **Thomas Jacques** *FRCS (ORL-HNS)*
Consultant ENT and Facial Plastic Surgeon

About this document

This document contains information about rhinoplasty and septorhinoplasty surgery, including risks and benefits, and the usual experience of patients undergoing the procedure.

Please take some time to read the information in this document carefully, as it will help you to understand the procedure, and what to expect from the recovery and healing periods.

As with all surgical procedures, patient experiences can vary, and the risks and benefits in your specific case will be discussed with you in advance of your procedure. If you are unsure about any aspect of surgery, please ask your surgeon in consultation or contact the team.

What is a rhinoplasty/septorhinoplasty?

Rhinoplasty is not a single operation, but a set of surgical techniques, that are used to alter the form and function of the nose. The procedure can be performed for cosmetic or functional problems, or a combination of the two. The skills used in rhinoplasty can be harnessed to refine the nasal appearance and bring it into better harmony with the facial features.

Rhinoplasty is probably the most challenging cosmetic procedure – the nose is a complex three-dimensional organ that not only forms the aesthetic centre of our face, but also has an essential role in our respiratory system and overall health. It is therefore vital that any operation that alters the structure of the nose is performed by a surgeon who understands its *functional* role, as well as facial aesthetics.

The terms “rhinoplasty” and “septorhinoplasty” are both used to describe surgical procedures that aim to improve or refine the appearance of the nose. Surgeons may prefer the term “septorhinoplasty” when the operation is also performed to address problems with the nasal airway, but the terms can also be used interchangeably.

Is rhinoplasty right for me?

There are many reasons why an individual may wish to have cosmetic nasal surgery; whether to make the nose appear slimmer or more refined, to reduce the prominence of a nasal hump, to change the shape or angulation of the nasal tip, or simply to enhance the overall harmony of the facial features. Because all patients are different, we aim to work with our patients to develop a full understanding of their wishes and expectations, and a bespoke treatment plan that suits their needs.

Many patients will simply “never have liked their nose” and will have decided now is the time to address this. Part of the assessment process is judging how well you will manage the journey of surgery and its ultimate outcome. Rhinoplasty is not a completely predictable process. Rhinoplasty can represent an emotional and sometimes psychologically challenging event for some patients. Bearing this in mind, it is vital that we work with you to develop an understanding of your motivations for surgery and your expectations of the outcome.

Your mental health is something that should never be overlooked when planning cosmetic surgery. In the same way, we may sometimes ask a patient to pause and reconsider their decision to have surgery if we are concerned it could be detrimental to their mental wellbeing. It is very important that you are open about any history of mental health concerns that you have. Some patients may require extra psychological support before we know whether rhinoplasty is right for them.

What happens in pre-surgical consultations?

The consultation and planning process is the most important part of your journey. Because of the complexity of cosmetic nasal surgery, it is vital that you have time and space to explore your concerns about your nasal appearance, learn about the procedure and what it can achieve for you, and to mutually agree the aims of *your* surgery.

This process should never be rushed, and you should always feel completely free to ask questions and express any doubts you may have about surgery. We are here to help you achieve your aims and feel confident about having surgery. Part of this is developing a realistic understanding of what changes can – and cannot – be achieved with your nasal appearance, as well as the potential complications and unpredictability that can arise when undertaking this surgery.

All patients undergoing cosmetic surgery under our care have a minimum of two consultations before their surgery. The aim of the first consultation is for you to explore your concerns about your nose, for your nose to be fully assessed and examined, and for you to receive an opinion about whether we can meet your aims with an operation.

Photographs will be taken as part of your medical record, and image morphing will be used if needed to simulate possible surgical results and facilitate the discussion about what you want to achieve.

Occasionally, further assessment may be required, particularly if there is distortion of the nasal airway, for example from previous injury. This assessment may include nasal endoscopy or a CT scan in some cases. This will be discussed with you if the need arises.

What are the limitations of rhinoplasty?

There is no such thing as a “simple” rhinoplasty. Changing a person’s nasal shape is not like moulding clay – each component of the nose reacts in a different and slightly unpredictable way to the changes that the operation creates. The existing shape of your nose, the thickness of your skin, and many other factors influence what is achievable for *your* nose. This is why pre-surgical planning is so important: some changes are achievable, and some are not.

There is rarely such thing as an absolutely “perfect” result: the aim of rhinoplasty is to *improve* nasal appearance rather than to perfect it. Even when the result at the end of the operation appears fantastic, the healing process can be unpredictable, and can reveal some ongoing issues, irregularities or asymmetries. Most often, these minor imperfections don’t compromise the overall result.

Even in the ideal situation and in the best hands, the result of a rhinoplasty can fall short of our expectations. It is important not to worry about the appearance of the nose during the healing stages, when swelling and healing tissue is present, and the final result cannot be accurately assessed.

A proportion of patients do request a second rhinoplasty procedure (revision). In many cases, this is a “touch-up”, for the improvement of a minor issue. Most rhinoplasty surgeons report that up to 10% of patients require a revision procedure: this is not normally considered until about a year after the initial surgery.

What are the risks of rhinoplasty?

For the majority of patients, rhinoplasty is a straightforward procedure, with no significant problems postoperatively. However all operations are associated with some risk, and it is a legal requirement that you are informed of all of the relevant risks of the procedure. It is also much easier to cope during the recovery phase if you know what to expect.

The main risks of rhinoplasty are listed below; however the list is not exhaustive, and risks specific to *your* care will be discussed with you before your operation.

Pain

This is *normal* but usually mild, and responds to painkillers such as paracetamol and ibuprofen. Your nose will also feel quite congested for a few weeks.

Bleeding

Small amounts of bleeding are *normal* after rhinoplasty, and tend to persist for a week or so. You may need to gently dab under your nose or wear a dressing under the nose for a few days. Avoid activities that may trigger bleeding, such as exercise, lifting, hot drinks or showers, for the first two weeks. Use cold/ice packs on the forehead if you have any oozing. If you have a persistent nosebleed for more than 30 minutes, get in touch with the hospital or call an ambulance. It is *uncommon* for there to be significant bleeding.

Infection

This is *uncommon*. You will be given antibiotics and antibiotic cream to help minimise the chance of infection. If your nose suddenly becomes more painful, red and/or blocked a few days after surgery this can indicate an infection, especially if there is yellow discharge from the nose or you have a fever – please get in touch urgently or attend your local Emergency Department.

Scar

If an “open” or external approach is used, there will be a small scar across the skin between the nostrils (the columella). This scar usually heals very well, and once it is mature it is very unusual for it to be noticeable.

Numbness/tightness

It is *common* for your nose, palate or upper teeth to feel numb or tingly immediately after surgery. Patients often describe a feeling of “tightness” across the area, or an unusual sensation when they smile, or that the nose feels “foreign” initially. All of this settles gradually over time, except that the nasal tip is often permanently stiffer due to the presence of supportive grafts that are placed during surgery. It is *rare* for there to be persistent numbness.

Skin changes

Occasionally, there can be some changes in the skin in the long term after rhinoplasty, such as thread-veins, altered pigmentation or thinner skin.

Reduced sense of smell

It is *extremely rare* for this to happen permanently after a rhinoplasty, but it has been reported. It is however common to have a reduced sense of smell for a while, due to the congestion caused by surgery.

Unsatisfactory cosmetic result

There is always a chance that the outcome of rhinoplasty does not meet our hopes or expectations. This can take the form of asymmetry or irregularities (see below), or some features of the nose may be slightly more or less altered than we hope. Some patients may require a further (revision) operation to improve the appearance of the nose further.

Minor asymmetry or irregularities

Some patients may notice small irregular areas of the nose, or slight asymmetries. It is *common* for these to occur due to the complexity of the operation; however in many cases these do not affect the acceptability of the overall result. Some irregularities are difficult to see, and so need no treatment. Many asymmetries or irregularities become less noticeable over time, so it helps not to focus on them too hard.

Septal perforation

The operation can result in a hole in the middle wall between the nostrils, leading to a hole in the septum. This can cause blockage, crusting or bleeding, or can cause no symptoms. Sometimes, further treatment or surgery is required. This is *rare*, occurring in 1% of patients or less.

Loss of nasal support

Rarely, poor healing or infection can lead to a significant loss of support of the nasal bridge or tip. If this occurs, significant revision surgery may be required. This occurs in only a very small number of patients, but it is impossible to eliminate this risk entirely.

Swelling and bruising

Swelling of the face and nose, and bruising under the eyes are *normal* after rhinoplasty. The majority of the noticeable swelling and bruising resolves within a few weeks. However the nose itself, and particularly the nasal tip, will remain swollen for many months. This is usually obvious to the patient, but not obvious to other people. It can therefore be difficult to assess the refinement of the nasal shape in the first few months after surgery, especially with respect to the tip. Full resolution of swelling and healing can take up to a year.

Psychological symptoms

It is *normal* to feel a little overwhelmed around the time of your operation, as well as to feel somewhat apprehensive about the eventual outcome. For a smaller number of patients, the process can exacerbate an underlying mental health difficulty. Some patients may have expectations that are not in line with the limitations and imperfections inherent in performing a rhinoplasty, leading to distress if small issues occur. This is why it is vital to have a clear and open discussion with your surgeon prior to surgery – no-one can guarantee a perfect result.

What are the costs of cosmetic rhinoplasty?

The total cost for rhinoplasty varies mainly according to complexity, with each patient requiring an individualised quote according to their needs from surgery and aftercare. Fees are generally made up of:

- 1. Consultation fee**

Consultation fees are for highly specialised assessment, and advice as to whether rhinoplasty is in your best interests. Patients will pay a consultation fee for their initial assessment, and for any necessary tests. However, further pre-operative and post-operative appointments are generally not chargeable.

- 2. Surgical and Anaesthetic fee**

These fees are payable in advance of your procedure, and cover the fee for your surgery and anaesthesia. We work with highly experienced Consultant Anaesthetists to ensure the safest and most comfortable experience for our patients. The fee may vary according to the length and complexity of your procedure; in particular whether this is your first procedure or a revision procedure.

- 3. Hospital fee**

This fee is payable directly to the hospital in which you have your surgery. It is determined by the hospital, and can vary by location. It includes fees for an overnight stay if required, nursing care, medications and supplies.

Before your operation

In the run-up to your rhinoplasty, it is entirely normal to feel a little apprehensive. Please feel free to reach out with any questions you have, and we will do our best to answer them.

Do your best to look after your general health around the time of your operation, in order to optimise your recovery and healing process. It is specifically worth mentioning that smoking is very undesirable for patients undergoing nasal surgery: it can lead to poorer healing and poorer outcomes, and raises the risk of severe infections.

You will have a pre-assessment appointment with the hospital to make sure you are safe to have the operation, you may need to have some other investigations, such as blood tests, as part of this. Usually this will be a phone call but occasionally you will have to attend in person.

It is also a good idea to maintain a regular, gentle skincare routine before surgery, and to wear SPF50 sun cream when outdoors. Avoid any harsh products such as AHA peels. If you have particular problems with your skin, we will talk about this during the assessment process.

In the two weeks before surgery, you must avoid taking medication that may increase bruising or bleeding. This includes aspirin or other blood thinners, as well as garlic and many other herbal supplements. If we diagnosed another nasal condition (such as rhinitis) during your assessment process, please continue the regular medication that controls this.

Arrange two weeks off work (if you require a sick certificate please ask the nurse on the day of your surgery). Arrange an escort (responsible adult) who will accompany you home from day surgery and stay with you overnight. Arrange transport to take you home after your surgery (either by car or taxi). Bring all the medication you are currently taking. Please inform the hospital if you have a cold, flu or tonsillitis in the two weeks before admission as your operation may need to be postponed.

How is a rhinoplasty performed?

Rhinoplasty is usually performed under a general anaesthetic: the patient is asleep and completely unaware of the procedure. There are two approaches to rhinoplasty, often known as “open” or “closed”, and also as “endonasal” or “external-approach”, respectively.

The open approach is increasingly popular for many rhinoplasty cases. This approach is not “more invasive” than the closed approach, because the same types of mobilisation and alteration of the nasal tissues is performed in either approach. In fact, in many cases it is easier to maintain and reconstruct the supporting soft tissue structures and ligaments of the nose via an open approach. The only noticeable difference is a very small scar across the skin between the nostrils (the columella). It is very rare for this scar to be noticeable in the long term.

After your operation

The first two or three weeks after a rhinoplasty operation can be uncomfortable, but is usually very manageable. We are available for advice if you have any concerns or questions. It is important to remember that the healing process is very long, and that the final result can't be judged in the first few months.

Rhinoplasty is not particularly painful, and any aching usually responds to simple painkillers. You will however be quite swollen and congested, with visible bruising under the eyes in some cases. You may find it comfortable to sleep more upright than normal, and to use a cold compress on the forehead. You will be provided with number of medications such as sprays and creams to make you more comfortable and help prevent infection – please use them exactly as directed, and contact us if you have any concerns.

You will have a rigid cast or splint on the outside of the nose, which we will remove around a week after your appointment. Any stitches we use are generally dissolvable, so it is unlikely you will need to have any removed. Your nose will be quite swollen at this point, so don't worry about its appearance.

It is completely normal and expected for your nose to feel “strange”, numb, or stiff after the operation. This will gradually improve over the weeks and months. Continue with a gentle skincare regime and perform gentle massage to lessen swelling. Ensure that you wear high-factor (SPF50) sun cream on your face for three months after surgery.

Your face will become less swollen over the first two weeks, but the nose itself will remain swollen for significantly longer, especially at the tip. This is normal – because of the swelling, it will be months before the overall result and refinement can be assessed. After a few weeks, the nose can start to look “bottom-heavy”, because the swelling resolves more quickly in the upper part of the nose compared to the tip.

The healing process after rhinoplasty

Throughout the first year after your operation, the appearance of the nose will gradually change. It is therefore very important not to judge the cosmetic outcome of the operation prematurely, as this will be affected by the presence of swelling, as well as the development of firm healing tissue (known as “callus”) on the bridge of the nose. Many patients will notice issues like asymmetry, residual bumps or irregularities during this period, many of which will improve over time. It is very important to be aware of this in advance, or you may worry unnecessarily.

You can return to work and normal activities after two weeks, and strenuous exercise after four weeks. After two weeks, it is unlikely that anybody will easily notice the effect of the operation, unless they know you very well. Contact sport is best avoided for about eight weeks.
