

## THE RIGHT SURGEON AT THE RIGHT TIME

When middle-schooler Shannon first came to see Dr. Gregg in 2017, she had already had a rhinoplasty performed elsewhere following an injury that badly broke her nose. Neither Shannon nor her mother thought the results looked or felt right, so they sought a second surgery with Dr. Gregg.

But Dr. Gregg told Shannon to wait. “There’s a right time for rhinoplasty,” she explains. “You don’t want to operate on someone’s nose until it’s fully matured, and Shannon, at 14, hadn’t finished growing. The initial surgery had been premature.”

As she was leaving her consultation with Dr. Gregg, Shannon told her mom that this advice made her feel better about Dr. Gregg. “Taking that pause to say there’s a whole picture to look at before we address that problem—that’s what gave me the confidence to go back,” she says.

Shannon and her mom returned in June of 2021. Now 18 years old, Shannon was most bothered by the painful bumps she had on her nose from the first surgery. Her nostrils also looked very asymmetrical due to a deviated septum. Dr. Gregg very clearly spelled out what she could and could not do.

“I loved instantly that Dr. Gregg did the whole process,” says Shannon. “She met with me to understand my story, and explained that because I had a previous surgery, this rhinoplasty would be higher risk. She made sure I knew this, but she also made me feel better because I was still in pain and didn’t realize how much I couldn’t breathe.”

By understanding Shannon’s priorities and challenges, Dr. Gregg was able to lay out a comprehensive plan to address them; and she performed Shannon’s second surgery in mid-December of last year. Dr. Gregg got rid of the painful bumps, but also straightened the septum for both aesthetic and functional reasons.

After five years of not breathing through her nose, Shannon had to be coaxed to try it immediately after the surgery, and was amazed to find that she could. And it was only a week later, when Dr. Gregg removed the cast, that Shannon and her family all cried to see the dramatic improvement.

“I remember that I took home flowers from Dr. Gregg to mark that day,” Shannon recalls, “And later I started crying again because I realized I could smell the flowers from across the kitchen!”

Full recovery will take many more months, but Shannon is thrilled with her progress just a few months after the surgery. “It’s amazing,” she says. “I don’t have a sensitivity anymore, which is fantastic. There’s no more unevenness on the surface of my nose and the swelling has gone down a lot.”

Because this was Shannon’s second surgery, she will have a slower recovery. She was originally nervous about that, so Dr. Gregg scheduled her surgery so most of her intensive recovery would occur during her month-long winter break.

By the time Shannon returned to school, things were mostly business as usual, despite some initial exercise limitations. But already, she’s back to her active lifestyle, even participating in college sports. “The only person who can really tell that anything’s happened is me,” Shannon says, smiling.

And the biggest takeaway for Shannon? “Don’t accept that you can’t breathe and don’t accept that you’re in pain.”

CYNTHIA GREGG, MD • FACE & BODY SPECIALISTS

# Improving Quality of Life: A Key to “Optimal” Health

“I could argue that everything we do is about helping our patients achieve optimal health,” observes Dr. Cynthia Gregg, one of the area’s pre-eminent facial plastic surgeons. “Because ‘optimal’ is such a personal thing. It’s about each of us wanting to be our best, to feel our best. And what all my patients tell me is that they want how they look on the outside to match how they feel on the inside.

“Like it or not,” she says, “we live in a world where people respond to us, in large measure, by how we look. And when people experience an improvement in their appearance, they simply carry themselves differently, with more confidence and openness.”

Dr. Gregg is double board-certified by the American Board of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery and the American Board of Otolaryngology—Head and Neck Surgery. And she views procedures such as rhinoplasty (nasal surgery), otoplasty (to correct protruding ears), and face lifts as critically important in helping many patients to achieve their goal of “optimal health.”

“Some of my rhinoplasty patients, for example, need help in overcoming functional issues, such as breathing problems due to obstruction,” she explains. “For others, the size or shape of their nose is a significant emotional problem. I have been struck often by the stories my patients tell me about how self-consciousness about their appearance affects their lives; even something as simple as being reluctant to have their picture taken or to be looked at in profile can have an enormous impact on their quality of life.”

## PROCEDURES THAT TRANSFORM LIVES

One recent rhinoplasty patient’s experience, underscores the transformative power of this procedure, notes Dr. Gregg. “This young patient—Shannon—needed surgery to correct problems from a broken nose and previous surgery—problems she had suffered from for five years (*see box*). And, when we removed the bandages a week after the surgery, both Shannon and her mother cried with happiness at the changes they saw.”

Shannon had come to Dr. Gregg with pain and breathing issues as well as cosmetic concerns. And it was her mother who insisted that she should not just accept the pain or not being able to breathe through her nose. Dr. Gregg also refused to accept that, promising the teenager: “It will be better.” And she was right.

“It’s always a blessing,” notes Dr. Gregg, “to do a rhinoplasty or a septoplasty/rhinoplasty combination that not only preserves or improves breathing, but gives them the confidence to be who they feel they are on the inside.”

Another procedure that can be life-changing is otoplasty. “We perform this surgery to set ears closer to the head or to reduce the size of large ears,” explains Dr. Gregg. “We often perform this surgery on children, because protruding ears can be a difficult burden for a child. But one of the most rewarding cases I recall was man in his mid-70s who decided, at long last, to fix the appearance of his ears, which had been an emotional burden to him for his entire life.

“Fred told me that, in his childhood, he had been tormented because of the size and shape of his ears and that, all through his life, he remained self-conscious about his appearance—something that affected his confidence and sense of self-worth. Even though he made the change late in his life, it was a change that completely altered the quality of his life.”

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## THE HEALING POWER OF A FACE LIFT

“Transformations that occur as the result of a rhinoplasty or otoplasty are dramatic,” acknowledges Dr. Gregg, “but although the changes made with a face lift are more subtle, they are just as powerful and just as positive.

“Many of my patients are middle-aged,” she notes, “and are focused on that goal of ‘achieving optimal health.’ They’re making a real effort to take care of themselves and to lead a healthy lifestyle. And, often, they’ve lost significant weight in that effort.

“They feel so good from their shoulders down because they’re feeling fit and wearing smaller sizes,” notes Dr. Gregg, “but their faces make them look older. Because, when you get your body in shape and lose weight, you’ve deflated so much that your face can look sunken. So, there’s a mismatch between the way you feel and the way you look.”

Dr. Gregg often suggests a lower-face lift for these patients. “Major weight change doesn’t really affect the brow or the eyes, she explains, “but it can dramatically affect the jawline and the neck. You start to see hollows where there was fullness, and with age, the skin loses some of its bounce, compounding the problem.

“I had one patient who had lost a hundred pounds and who said: ‘Now you’re going to make my face match the rest of me!’ The face lift was the final step—completing all the hard work she had done to improve her overall health and physical condition.” **h&h**



A patient before and after a face and neck lift.



# Body Changes for Optimal Health



Dr. Gregg, right, and Dr. Wu

Like Dr. Gregg, Dr. Cindy Wu recognizes the powerful relationship between body image and overall health. “Addressing aesthetic body concerns has an enormous impact on patients’ self-confidence and self-esteem,” she says, “which is hugely important for over-all health.”

“I would say the ultimate goal of the surgery that I do—in fact, the goal for any aesthetic surgeon—is to enhance the patient’s quality of life,” says Dr. Wu. “It’s not just rewarding for the patient, it’s the very heart of what I do.”

A double board-certified aesthetic and breast surgeon, Dr. Wu’s specialties include breast augmentation, reduction, lift, fat grafting, abdominoplasty, liposuction, and body contouring.

“Breast surgery takes many forms,” notes Dr. Wu, “and is uniquely tailored to each patient—taking into account not only aesthetic considerations but functional and lifestyle issues.”

“For example, some women find that breast reduction surgery can be liberating,” she explains, “because they can’t be as active with disproportionately heavy breasts. This is extremely important, since movement and exercise are essential contributors to optimal health and wellness.”

## SUCCESS STORIES

“The most commonly requested procedures in my practice,” says Dr. Wu, are breast reductions, the so-called ‘mommy makeover,’ and breast implants or explants. For all of these patients, the goal is a change that will significantly improve their quality of life.”

One example of a transformational surgery is a 55-year-old woman we’ll call Marjorie. “Marjorie wanted both a breast reduction and a tummy tuck,” says Dr. Wu. “But her body mass index (BMI) was too high for the tummy tuck—due, in part, because her overly large breasts made exercise difficult. So, we started with a breast reduction, which would allow her to exercise more easily and get her BMI to a healthy level.”

And that’s what happened. After the breast reduction surgery, Marjorie was able to lose weight and became a

candidate for the second surgery. Ultimately, Dr. Wu helped her achieve the results she wanted, using a safer, phased approach.

Another frequently requested surgery combination is known as a “mommy makeover.” “Many women choose these combination surgeries to get their body back to where it was before they had children,” explains Dr. Wu. “The surgery is highly individualized, and might include anything from a breast augmentation to a breast lift or reduction combined with a tummy tuck or liposuction.”

Despite the name, the “mommy makeover” is also used for those who haven’t given birth. “It’s simply a way of describing any combination of breast and body surgery,” explains Dr. Wu.

“A good example of a candidate for this procedure is a recent patient of mine, that I’ll call Deborah. Deborah is 27, and has not had children. However, she had sagging, extra skin on her breasts and abdomen, not as a result of pregnancy, but due to excessive weight gain and weight loss during puberty.”

Dr. Wu explained that, although Deborah was young and tried hard to exercise, she struggled with a lot of extra skin that didn’t retract due to being stretched out from weight fluctuations. “She also had a congenital condition known as a tuberous breast deformity, where the breast has a more tubular shape to it,” says Dr. Wu. “So, her surgical plan included implants with a lift to reshape her breasts, along with a tummy tuck.”

As Deborah happily reported afterwards: “I was so ashamed of my body for so long. And now I am so confident!”

Dr. Wu notes that, like breast reduction surgery, mommy makeovers can have an important impact on function as well as appearance. “Some women who have given birth—particularly petite women—can experience a separation in their ‘six-pack’ muscles,” she explains. “After delivery, the abdominal muscles typically go back to the baseline, but sometimes there remains a gap because the babies have pushed the muscles apart. And if you have that separation, you can’t effectively work out your core muscles because the muscles are not in the right place. These women may be killing it at the gym and eating really well, but they have a rounded abdomen and can’t do a crunch effectively. With a tummy tuck, we can close that gap and remove the extra skin.”

## BREAST IMPLANT SURGERY: COMPLEX, PERSONAL

“Breast surgery,” notes Dr. Wu, “is by definition complex and highly individualized. And that is particularly true when inserting or removing implants.”

“Explant surgery—to remove a patient’s breast implants—is a good example of this complexity,” she explains. “Women have many reasons for wanting implants

removed. Over time, their bodies change and they may feel their breasts are now too big, or they may have personal health concerns.

“Whatever the reason, there are many different possibilities—depending on their anatomy—for meeting the patient’s individual goals and needs,” she says. “These might include implant removal alone, implant removal with a breast lift, or implant removal with a breast lift and fat grafting. It’s complex, but it’s very highly individual to the patient.”

One of the particular challenges posed by implants, notes Dr. Wu, is the heightened risk that accompanies any surgical procedure where something is inserted into the body, as well as the risk of a reaction called capsular contracture, which is a hardening of the scar tissue that naturally occurs around the implant.

“There’s research to show that if you have a low level of bacteria—nothing clinically obvious, but just some bacteria slowly proliferating over the years—it can cause the capsule to become thicker and firmer because that’s how your body reacts to inflammation,” she explains. “And that’s something we particularly want to prevent. So, for implant surgery, we follow a rigorous 14-step plan to minimize the chances of contamination or infection and helps to prevent capsular contracture.”

Among these special precautions: prepping the skin and the insertion pocket with antimicrobial solution; keeping the pocket as bloodless as possible to avoid feeding bacteria; and following a careful process with several layered safeguards around the handling and ultimate insertion of the implant. *M&H*



Before and after a “Mommy Makeover”

For more information, contact:

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