SKIN

I Got Rhinoplasty at 25 — Here's What to Expect From a Nose Job

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Photographed by Thomas Prior

By Carrieanne Reichardt, as told to Jolene Edgar. Note: This article contains images of a surgical procedure being performed.

I love so many of my features. For instance, the green eyes I got from my mom, my naturally full lips, and smile, but my nose has been a source of insecurity. Around 15, as puberty hit, my nose just...changed. One day, it suddenly looked large and awkward, with a pronounced bump and protruding tip that I simply didn't identify with. I'd catch my profile in the mirror and be uncomfortable with the face staring back.

I felt particularly insecure about my nose when starting college, as I was presenting myself to the world, independently, for the first time. Whenever I met anyone new, I'd be very careful to talk to them only head-on, so they couldn't glimpse my profile. By 19, I was researching rhinoplasty surgery, and my dad even took me for a nose-job consultation, but I didn't feel the surgeon was a good fit, so we decided to table the idea.

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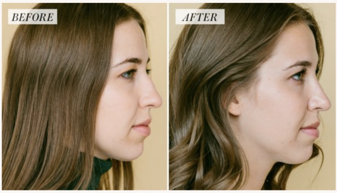

When I moved to New York City after graduation, and began establishing myself and building a career, I suddenly felt the time was right to revisit the procedure. I met with Adam Kolker, a well-known plastic surgeon here in New York City, and immediately felt safe and heard. I respected his delicate, conservative approach and appreciated how he spent real time listening to my concerns and making sure I felt comfortable.

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Once I firmly made the decision to move ahead with the rhinoplasty surgery, I told my family. With four siblings, there's never a shortage of opinions, but they were all extremely supportive. I inherited my nose from my mother, and when I told her the news, she revealed for the first time that she had once considered getting a nose job, too, which was majorly shocking, because my mom is very reserved and rarely criticizes, or even talks about, her appearance. She's just always seemed so comfortable in her skin. I really admire that about her.

The Consultation

My consult with Dr. Kolker set me at ease. We started out talking casually about my nose — what I liked and disliked about it, any relevant medical concerns, that sort of thing. Then he did an evaluation to see if I'd be a candidate for rhinoplasty. He inspected the inside of my nose to check for a deviated septum (all clear). He examined the thickness of my skin, measured the width of my nose, and checked out the tip, all quick and painless.

Then he took a bunch of pictures from different angles and stepped out to review them. A few minutes later, we sat down in his office to go over the images. He showed me three distinct perspectives: front, profile, and from below, which he called the worm's-eye view. With each photo, he presented a revised image of what my nose could look like with surgery — and, wow, what a rush of happiness! It was honestly everything I was hoping for: smoother and smaller, but still me.

Dr. Kolker then laid out his surgical plan for me: He'd perform an open rhinoplasty, explaining that the difference between an open and closed procedure amounts to a small incision on the underside of the columella (that skinny strip of skin between the nostrils), which can be seen only from below and fades rapidly. Both procedures require incisions inside the nose, but an open rhinoplasty adds that small columellar incision.

The main advantage of an open surgery, he said, is that it increases exposure of the anatomy for improved visualization, which allows the doctor to be more precise in his surgical maneuvers, and eliminates a key risk associated with the closed rhinoplasty, which is a distortion of the results when instruments are retracted through the nostrils. He believed the open method would be safest and most effective for me since he'd essentially be reworking my entire nose — refining not just the bridge but the tip as well.

I had wrongly assumed he could simply flatten the hump and be done, but he explained that you can't sculpt one area without considering how it'll impact everything else. If he smoothed the bridge and did nothing else, my nose could wind up looking far too wide from the front. So ultimately, he would need to break my nose and seamlessly draw it in closer to create the precise size and shape I was after. He'd also have to reduce the cartilage at the tip and turn it up slightly, from 91 to 93 degrees. In the end, my nose would be smaller, with a straighter bridge, a refined tip, and more clearly defined nostrils.

Before I left his office, Dr. Kolker took me through some before-and-after shots of some of his rhinoplasty patients. Many of them had noses similar to mine, and their "after" pictures were much like the ones Dr. Kolker had generated for me. He told me that of all the nose jobs he'd done in his career, only one time did he have to go back and operate again, and that was because the patient wanted a more drastic change. That clinched it for me: I knew I was in good hands and that my result would be subtle and not overly "done."

Once we set a date for surgery, Dr. Kolker prescribed various vitamins (C, B12, and zinc) to start taking one week prior to surgery to prep my body for the trauma and help speed recovery. I'd have to avoid red wine and blood thinners (like Advil) for two weeks beforehand. He prescribed pain medication, too, but said I may only need Tylenol post-op because the discomfort isn't all that bad. There would be lots of bruising and swelling, but after six weeks, he said, my appearance should be back to normal, only with a better nose. After three months, I'd be 75 percent healed, but the swelling wouldn't fully subside for one year.

The Surgery

The morning of surgery, I was definitely feeling nervous, but the jitters had actually set in full force the week before. I was mostly anxious about getting everything together and making sure I was as prepared as possible for the recovery period. My biggest worry was the unknown: How would I look and feel? How would others react to seeing me? And there were, of course, some second thoughts, like, *Do I really need this? Is this actually going to make me happier and more self-confident?* I was even feeling a little guilty about the superficial nature of the whole thing — like, a nose job is not something I truly need. But I knew if I decided, last minute, to pull the plug on the operation, I'd regret it, because I'd still be unhappy with my nose — and that realization outweighed all of my fears.

My roommate, Kelsi, who's also my childhood best friend, came with me to Dr. Kolker's office. After a few final checks, Dr. Kolker took more pictures, then marked up my nose. He said people generally puff up under anesthesia, and things can get distorted, so this, in his words, "helps keep him honest." A nurse led me into the OR, and the last thing I remember before going under was this feeling of deep gratitude and thanking everyone there for playing a part in helping me feel better about myself.

I awoke from surgery feeling just as overwhelmed and then crying happy tears. I blame the drugs...in part, anyway. I was in the recovery room with a splint on my nose. I had to go to the bathroom, and I remember feeling sort of drunk as I walked down the hall (again, drugs). When I got to the restroom, I thought, Should I look in the mirror? I did, very quickly, and what a relief! I could see the tip of my nose, and it already looked different. I figured if the splint was any indication of my new shape, I'd be thrilled, as it resembled a very smooth ski slope.

I had gauze under my nose to catch the blood but otherwise looked pretty normal, as the swelling and bruising hadn't set in yet. I wasn't in much pain — I described the sensation to a nurse as a bad sunburn, tight and sore. I could breathe so freely through my nose, which was something new for me. Dr. Kolker had fixed a valve in there — a sweet bonus.

The Recovery

When Kelsi took me home shortly after I woke up, I felt fine. We talked and watched TV, then I dozed off for a bit. I couldn't stay awake for more than an hour or two before needing to rest. My throat was raw from the breathing tube. And it hurt to laugh. When the hospital meds wore off, I had a full-on headache, almost like severe caffeine withdrawal. But the discomfort never got so bad that I needed Percocet; Tylenol alone made it manageable. That first night, I thought I'd sleep terribly, but I was out cold from 9:30 p.m. to 6 a.m. It was tricky settling in, though, because I had to sleep with my head propped up on several pillows to minimize swelling, which isn't exactly easy for a side sleeper.

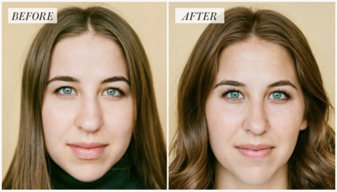
By the next day, I was looking more like a monster and didn't want to see anyone. The bruises around my eyes shined a bright greenish-purple, and I was swollen all over with some intense pressure in my head. I couldn't breathe through my nose anymore, because of all the blood and swelling. I felt congested and uncomfortable, almost like I had a bad cold, but again, nothing Tylenol couldn't handle. But I fully expected this, as Dr. Kolker said it could take two weeks for everything to run its course.

With each day that passed, I felt a bit better. My surgery was on a Monday, and by Thursday I was well enough to do some work from home, like answering emails. On Friday night, I went to see a movie, and it felt so great to be out. (At that point, the swelling had dropped to my jaw, the bruises had faded, and I looked fairly sane, save for the splint.) I spent most of the weekend running errands, working, and enjoying spring in Central Park. It was a little weird to be out in the splint, but not bad enough to keep me cooped up in my apartment. And I think being active helped me rebound faster.

On Monday — seven days after surgery — I was officially back at work and got my splint removed, too. When Dr. Kolker handed me the mirror for the big reveal, I almost didn't want to look. But when I did, I literally cried tears of joy. I truly hated my nose before, and suddenly it was so cute. It's tinier, and I love that the tip doesn't jut out the way it used to. I can't believe this is my new nose! It’s a wonderful relief to finally be proud of a feature that never felt right to me.

Three Months Post-Procedure

This experience has been life-changing. My new nose is absolute perfection, and I haven't experienced a tinge of regret. I've felt so completely taken care of by Dr. Kolker and his team, and have received so much support from my friends and family. My mom and sister still ask for pictures every day.



Hannah Choi/*Allure*

When you're in the thick of the recovery, it seems like you're going to look and feel that way forever. But honestly, I moved through it so quickly. Days two and three were the toughest, but witnessing my body heal like that was pretty incredible. Each day, I looked considerably different from the day before, which is strange — you really can't get too attached to any one image in the mirror because you know it's still evolving.

Before surgery, friends and family would say they didn't see anything wrong with my nose, but to have something that's so personal and integral to you feel so wrong...it's exhausting and disheartening. Now I feel not only more beautiful but way more comfortable in my own skin — just like my mom. And now those same friends see the difference and compliment me.

If you're considering undergoing a rhinoplasty procedure, seek out a board-certified plastic surgeon for an initial consultation.