Face it!

CAVEAT EMPTOR: That’s advice you expect to hear when redoing your kitchen, not so much your face. Yet that’s exactly what medical insiders recommend to women who are contemplating a visit to a plastic surgeon’s office.

And we’re not talking about negotiating a fair price or finding hygienic facilities; we mean sourcing a qualified doctor. In this burgeoning medical field known as aesthetic plastic surgery — which has grown 155 per cent since 1997, according to a new American survey — what you see is not always what you get; you must ask questions to ensure both your safety and your satisfaction.

“The field of aesthetic surgery is less regulated than other surgical fields,” says Elizabeth Hall-Findlay, past president of the Canadian Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery and the owner of Banff Plastic Surgery in Alberta.

“Sadly, there have been problems, even deaths, and often the ones you hear about were surgeries performed by a physician who was not trained as a plastic surgeon.”

In Canada, the regulation and certification of medical specialties, including plastic surgery, falls to the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons. But the breakdown
Why don’t the regulatory bodies in Canada treat plastic surgery with the same respect as cardiac surgery?

All surgeries, of course, have risks; general ones include infection, bruising and bleeding, says Hall-Findlay. “But the risk is going to be less with someone who has been fully trained. One of the reasons plastic surgeons can get good aesthetic results with face surgery is because they understand the principles involved in reconstructive surgery, including the anatomy of nerves, etc., around the face.” However, it’s not just about preventing complications, but also about being able to anticipate and then work around them.

“Plastic surgeons are best trained to prevent nerve damage — and in the unlikely case that it occurs, they are also the best trained to assess and correct any such problems,” explains Hall-Findlay. “Sometimes problems occur because the untrained person doesn’t know when things are not going right. They are not comfortable with diagnosis (for instance, understanding when a facial nerve has been damaged). They can’t recognize the problem and so diagnosis of a complication is delayed.”

If we talk... The other major risk of plastic surgery is not getting the face you thought you’d signed up for, again often the result of being in the hands of someone who is under-qualified.

Here, communication is king, and an experienced surgeon knows that, says Sean Rice, medical director of Rice Cosmetic Surgery in Toronto. “True, mistakes are few and far between, but unexpected results are different.”

The only way to ensure you get the face you want is to talk — and then talk some more. “Both sides need to talk, talk — and then talk some more. "Both sides need to talk, talk — and then talk some more. “Both sides need to talk, talk — and then talk some more.”

Says Lista: “If you have a problem at 2 a.m., and you need to figure out before then what your plan of action will be. “If your doctor is difficult to reach or talk to, it’s not likely a good fit.”

Skin type, bone structure, face shape — all of these elements play a role. You can ask for — and get — Angelina’s lips, says Lisa. “People are turned off by that; they feel they are in a production line. But you know what? This gives the best surgical result, and it’s been reported in surgical literature.”

Practice makes perfect /// In addition to validating the surgeon’s credentials, it’s also important to ensure he is experienced, observes Frank Lista, medical director of The Plastic Surgery Clinic in Toronto and Mississauga, Ont.

“Surgical results are directly related to the surgeon’s individual volume. The surgeon who does 500 surgeries is better than the one who does 200,” he says. “Some people are turned off by that; they feel they are in a production line. But you know what? This gives the best surgical result, and it’s been reported in surgical literature.”

ASK THIS BEFORE YOU DO THAT!

Is there an eye job in your future? Maybe a tummy tuck? Before you plung into that. Here are questions you need to ask to ensure your safety, says Frank Lista, medical director of The Plastic Surgery Clinic in Toronto and Mississauga, Ont.

1. DO YOU HAVE HOSPITAL PRIVILEGES? You want to know if the doctor is associated with a local hospital and is able to work there. “For instance, some obstetricians do lipo in their private clinics but don’t have permission to call it a hospital, and you have to wonder why that is,” points out Lista.

2. WHO IS ON CALL FOR YOU? Emergencies can’t be talked. You could have a problem at 2 a.m., and you need to figure out before then what your plan of action will be. “If your doctor is difficult to reach or talk to, it’s not likely a good fit.”

3. WHAT KIND OF POST-OP CARE CAN I EXPECT? You can get a sense of this early on. If your doctor is difficult to reach or talk to, it’s not likely a good fit.”

4. Can you talk to other patients who have had the surgery before? “A trained doctor will help you manage your expectations accordingly. It’s just one more reason for being your own advocate and shopping around for the best doctor.”

It’s your body and your money, and no one is going to check it out more than you. Don’t assume someone else has done your homework,” says Lista.

When I see plastic surgery gone wrong, or someone who’s had surgery by someone not qualified, they often say, ‘You know, I just assumed that this person had the qualifications.’ Well, there are good qualifications and there are lousy qualifications, and it’s up to the patient to figure that out.”