

## When your daughter wants breast implants...

Many parents have a daughter graduating from high school this school year. For thousands of them, gone are the days of graduation presents being a watch or money. Many parents will agree to the wishes of their teenager and buy her breasts for her graduation present.

According to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons there were almost 4,000 breast augmentation surgeries performed on teens (girls age 18 and under) during 2003. That represents a 24 percent increase over the amount performed in 2002, with comparable increases each year. For the parent who has a teenager seeking this surgery, there are many issues to consider including costs, risks and the emotional aspect of making such a decision.

### What's the motivation?

Although they're starting the trend at an early age, one could make the argument that these young girls are simply following in the footsteps of the example being set by many older women. After all, adult women underwent more than 250,000 breast augmentation surgeries in 2003 alone. The motivations for wanting breast implant surgery, when there is no physical impairment or defect, varies from person to person. One thing experts agree upon is that the women are striving to live up to a standard of beauty that is not reality based. Today teenagers are bombarded with videos, movies and magazines filled with images of unreal expectations of what is attractive.

"As a society, we have definite expectations on how we believe women should look," said Dr. Tracey Stulberg of the Birmingham Family Therapy Clinic. "When we allow others to dictate standards of acceptable physical appearance based on the size of our breasts, we have failed."

Dr. Anthony Youn of The Beverly Hills Plastic Surgery Center in Rochester Hills points out that the media glamorizes many young entertainers who appear to have gotten breast implants as teens. "Some of them have developed their breasts naturally," he said, "but in the age of push-up bras and taping breasts together, it can be very difficult to discern natural breasts from augmented breasts."

Adds Dr. Amy Youn of Mali and Mali Pediatrics, P.C. in Troy, "I think

young women are seduced by the media image of the perfect body, which is a thin waist, round bottom and large breasts," she said. "This ideal goes far beyond what is actually a normal, healthy body type which, of course, can come in all different shapes and sizes."

### Confidence and self-esteem

Most signs point to teenage girls getting breast implants as a means of boosting self-esteem, but there are alternative ways to encourage girls to feel good about their bodies and increase their confidence. "Once they realize how amazing their bodies are — just as they are — they become less preoccupied with how they fit into the image of the perfect body," said Dr. Amy Youn.

If a teen under her care has concerns about her body image, Dr. Youn said she would first screen for an underlying illness, such as depression or an eating disorder, and then refer the patient to a psychologist if necessary. Next, she'd encourage the girl's parents to get her involved in extracurricular activities, especially sports, which help to increase strength and stamina. She said the sports don't need to be competitive, as many of girls would rather dance, bike, walk, do yoga or hike.

"As parents, we have an obligation to encourage our young women to appreci-

### Breast Implant Surgery by the Numbers:

**\$4,000-\$6,700:** Average total cost

**18:** Age requirement

**3,841:** Total procedures in 2003 (18 or under)

**24 percent:** Amount of increase over 2002

**254,140:** Total breast augmentations in 2003

**7.4 million:** Total cosmetic plastic surgeries in 2003

**82 percent:** Those patients who are women

ate and love themselves for their abilities and accomplishments," said Dr. Stulberg. "We need to teach our young women to love their bodies."

## Safety issues

As with any surgery, there are risks associated with breast augmentation including implant ruptures, bleeding, capsular contracture, calcification, infections and anesthesia-related complications. Capsular contracture happens after scar tissue is formed, causing a change in breast shape. Calcification occurs when calcium deposits form around the scar tissue which can cause pain. An additional risk to teenagers is that their breasts may continue to develop after the surgery, which can cause the size to become too large!

## Bottom line

"Teens are still too young to make a decision as important and serious as this one," insisted Dr. Anthony Youn. Most

experts agree with him that this surgery for teens is not advisable and that only those young women with birth defects or developmental deformities should undergo the procedure.

According to Dr. Amy Youn, at this time in their lives, girls are more immature in their decision making, often having impulsive "gut-based" reactions to things as compared to adults who generally make decisions based on problem solving, insight and judgment.

"The biggest concern for parents is the message they're sending their daughters about the importance of large breasts," said Dr. Stulberg. She suggests that if a parent has a teenager asking for this surgery, they really spend some time discussing the issue. Not only is it important for the parents to understand why the surgery is wanted, but it's equally important for the teen to understand the reasons behind her parents' decision. ■

*—Jacqueline Bodnar of Nevada is a freelance writer.*