Hey, Mama

Kanye West's mother died of cosmetic surgery complications. Are you at risk too?

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Plastic surgery is gaining popularity among African Americans. However, the death this past November of Donda West, mother of hip-hop star Kanye West, due to complications from liposuction and breast-reduction procedures, is a wake-up call for awareness.

Julius W. Few, MD, associate professor of plastic surgery at Northwestern University in Chicago, says that in capable hands, cosmetic surgery has minimal risks. (Carrying extra weight, smoking and having uncontrolled diabetes, however, can increase the risk.) Here he suggests five questions to ask before you proceed:

1. Is the surgeon board-certified by the American Board of Medical Specialties? (Visit ABMS.org.)
2. Will the surgery be done at a fully accredited hospital or operating center? (Go to AAAASF.org/consumers.php.)
3. Does the surgeon have experience treating people of color? (Risks for darker skin include scarring and discoloration, such as lightening or darkening.)
4. How many years of experience does the doctor have performing your procedure?
5. Is there another patient you can speak to about his/her experience with the doctor?

For more information, check with the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (surgery.org) and the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (plasticsurgery.org).

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