

Aesthetics

Aesthetics Before & After Photography Guidelines



*These guidelines were developed with guidance from our Clinical Advisory Board and have been thoroughly peer-reviewed by its members

The Importance of Standardised Imagery

High-quality before and after (B&A) photography is essential for demonstrating treatment efficacy, maintaining professional standards, and ensuring transparency in medical aesthetics.

Poorly captured images can misrepresent results, reduce credibility, and create patient dissatisfaction.

This could include:

- Unclear imagery
- Bad lighting or inconsistent lighting
- Inconsistent backgrounds
- Different angles
- Patient wearing makeup or jewellery
- Images that have been edited or filtered
- Inconsistent hair styles or hair covering the face
- Different facial expressions i.e one static and one dynamic
- Selfies

This guide provides best practices to standardise B&A photography in the aesthetics community.

Standardised photography ensures:

- Accurate visual documentation of treatment outcomes
- Enhanced credibility in case studies, award entries, and scientific publications
- Improved patient trust by setting realistic expectations

Step 1: Patient Preparation

- Obtain written consent before capturing and using photographs for marketing or publication.
- Ensure patients remove makeup and jewellery to avoid distractions.
- Maintain consistent hair styling (e.g., tied back or tucked behind ears) to expose treated areas.
- Advise patients to wear neutral, plain-coloured clothing to minimise distractions.
- Confirm the patient's posture is upright and relaxed for uniformity across images.

Step 2: Camera & Equipment Recommendations

- Use a high-resolution digital camera (DSLR or mirrorless preferred) for professional-quality images.
- Avoid smartphone cameras unless they offer consistent settings and high resolution.
- Utilise a tripod to maintain stability and consistent angles.
- If available, use a standardised photography system to ensure uniform lighting and positioning.

Step 3: Lighting & Background

- **Lighting:** Use soft, even lighting to prevent shadows and highlights that distort results.
- Avoid direct flash or strong backlighting that may alter skin appearance.
- **Background:** Choose a plain, neutral-coloured (light grey or blue) backdrop for consistency.

- Conduct photography in a controlled environment (no windows or variable light sources).

Step 4: Positioning & Angles

- Maintain a fixed camera-to-patient distance to avoid image distortion.
- Capture images at eye level to ensure an accurate representation.

Standard angles:

- Frontal (full face/body) – patient looking straight ahead
- 45-degree oblique (left and right) – slight head turn for contour visibility
- 90-degree profile (left and right) – full side profile
- Additional angles depending on the treatment area (e.g., close-ups for fine detail)
- Instruct patients to keep a neutral facial expression to ensure a fair comparison.

Step 5: Image Consistency

- Use the same camera settings for all images (aperture, white balance, ISO, etc.).
- Ensure the same angle, lighting, and positioning for all B&A photos.
- Keep clothing and hair consistent between images.
- Avoid cropping in-camera; leave enough space around the subject for post-processing adjustments.

Step 6: Data Protection Regulations

1. **Patient Consent:** Images of patients are classified as personal data under data protection laws. Any information revealing details of a patient's health condition is considered sensitive personal data. Explicit permission is required before capturing and using patient images.
2. **Data Storage:** Store all patient images securely, adhering to data protection regulations such as GDPR. Ensure images are stored in a manner that maintains confidentiality and prevents unauthorised access.
3. **Anonymisation:** Even if images are anonymised, it's good practice to seek patient consent before using them in public media.

8. Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) Guidelines

Whenever you are taking and using imagery in marketing, social media or online, it's important to consider ASA guidance.

These include:

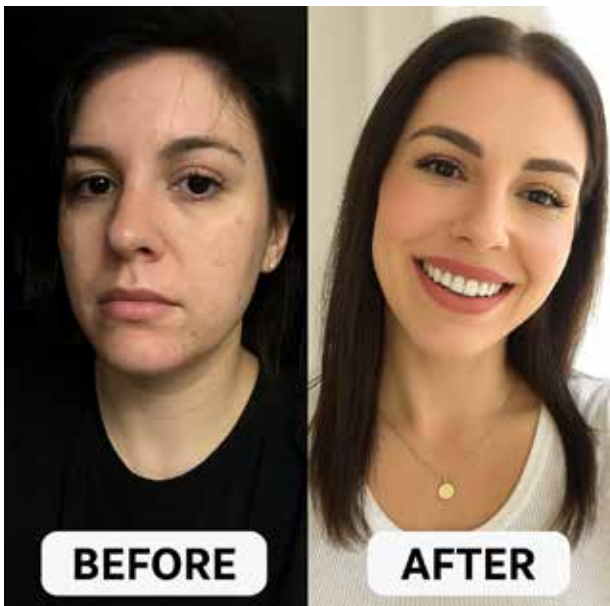
- **Accuracy:** Ensure that all marketing materials, including B&A images, are factual and verifiable. Avoid making unjustifiable claims about treatment outcomes.
- **Use of Images:** B&A images should not exaggerate the effects of a treatment. The ASA advises that such images must not give the impression of an effect beyond what is supported by evidence.
- **Ethical Marketing:** Do not trivialise the risks involved in procedures or use promotional tactics that might encourage ill-considered decisions. Marketing should not pressure individuals into undergoing treatments.

9. Consulting Patients & Obtaining Consent

- **Transparent Communication:** Clearly explain the purpose of taking photographs and how they will be used. Ensure patients understand that their images may be used for treatment documentation, educational purposes, or marketing, and specify the platforms where the images might appear.
- **Voluntary Participation:** Emphasise that participation is voluntary and that declining will not affect the quality of care they receive.
- **Documentation:** Use a comprehensive consultation form to record the patient's consent, detailing the agreed-upon uses of their images. This form should include sections where patients can specify their preferences regarding the use of their images in various contexts.
- **Ongoing Consent:** Inform patients that they can withdraw their consent at any time and provide them with a clear process to do so.

Best Practices for Presenting Images

Examples of bad before and after imagery:



Examples of good before and after imagery:



Conclusion

Standardised B&A photography is crucial for maintaining professional integrity, improving patient confidence, and ensuring fair representation of treatment results. By following these guidelines, aesthetic practitioners can elevate the quality of clinical imagery, enhance credibility, and contribute to a more ethical and transparent specialty.

For further guidance, please contact editorial@aestheticsjournal.com or consult our Clinical Advisory Board.

