

Facelifts:

Are They Just Skin Deep?



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BACKGROUND:

Many of us are familiar with a tight, “wind swept” facial appearance that is the result of an obvious facelift. They are usually (but unfortunately not always) seen in older persons who may have had surgery two or three decades ago.

A quick word about terminology. A “facelift” usually involves a tightening of the neck as well and therefore includes a “neck lift”. There are indeed patients who have some mid-facial aging without significant neck laxity, and those patients will require less extensive surgery. More about that later.

Fortunately, both approach and techniques have come a long way in recent years with the goals of surgery being to achieve a more natural and refreshed appearance, rather than something that looks obviously “operated”. Today’s patient is more typically in her 40’s or 50’s, the thinking being that you can enjoy your enhanced and more youthful appearance sooner, and not wait until the changes are so significant that you have been forced to look older than you feel for ten or fifteen years before succumbing to the idea of surgery. The younger you are when you have surgery, there is a possibility that less extensive surgery will be necessary.

THE AGING FACE: What happens?

In recent years, plastic surgeons have come to understand facial aging far better than in years past. As a consequence, surgical techniques have been modified and adapted to reflect some of the newer concepts of facial aging. For example, we know that some facial fat is an integral part of a youthful appearance. If you look at your child you will see a greater degree of roundness in the cheeks, for example. As we age, that fat tends to both descend (due to gravitational forces over a lifetime) and also atrophy. We therefore know that we should NOT be removing very much in the way of fat, but rather repositioning it upward toward the cheek. This accomplishes two things: adding fullness where it belongs, and eliminating the heavy folds between the cheek and lip.

Our faces also tend to age uniformly rather than segmentally. Therefore a patient, who may be a candidate for a facelift, may also need his or her eyes and brows rejuvenated as well. We all age differently, and while there are thirty year olds who may actually benefit from a facelift, and sixty year olds who would



Figure 1 (a,b,c,d): 50 year old woman seen before (a,b), and six months after (c,d) facelift, brow lift and upper and lower blepharoplasty (eyelids).

not, common patterns of aging are often seen, and they usually involve the whole face.

SURGICAL TECHNIQUES: **What's New?**

The most significant development in recent years is definitely shorter scars. We rarely need to extend the scar behind the ear into the hairline these days to achieve a really pretty and significant improvement of the neck and jaw line. Also, we have a better understanding of repositioning the deeper tissues, including the fatty layers usually

with sutures, to help achieve a more youthful appearance. We can also enhance the facelift with fat injections (your own) easily extracted from hips, tummy or buttocks, and the use of fillers can also nicely complement the results from a facelift. Arnica Montana, an herbal supplement, has been shown to be beneficial in reducing bruising and swelling, and most patients can expect to be back in circulation within 7-14 days following most facelifts today. Unlimited activity including exercise should be avoided for about a month after surgery.

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Figure 2 (a,b,c,d): 61 year old woman seen before (a,b) and one year after (c,d) face and neck lift, and upper and lower blepharoplasty (eyelids).




Face Lift

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AND FINALLY:

Beware of catchy terms such as "weekend lift", "lifestyle lift", "lunch time lift", etc. Most of the techniques that sound too good to be true are just that, a clever marketing term that has more to do with hooking you than any actual advantages as far as results. If it is done in the office under local anesthesia, the chances are you are going to be more uncomfortable in the process. Furthermore, if it's "quick and easy", it is probably both expensive, and with results that are probably minimal. Surgery should be performed in an accredited operating room facility, with strict sterile technique, not in an exam chair in the office or clinic setting. There are no short cuts to good careful surgery if that

is what you need, and many of the catchy quick procedures so commonly advertised today are offered by non-plastic surgeons with minimal training in the advanced techniques of modern facial rejuvenation. 

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