

## Procedures

### Facelift



#### What are the issues?

As we get older, our skin loses its elasticity and our facial muscles tend to slacken. Wrinkles appear, particularly at the corners of the mouth and eyes, and the natural folds of our face deepen. Eventually, the mouth, neck and jaw line begin to sag due to the inevitable effects of gravity and the skin becomes slack. Around the eyes, the effects of ageing can be seen in the eyelids and eyebrows.

This process seems to happen more quickly in some people than others. The rate is probably determined genetically, although other factors such as smoking, weight loss and sun exposure also contribute.

Many people feel their facial appearance does not reflect how they feel inside and they may start to consider surgical or non-surgical methods to rejuvenate their appearance.

A facelift is the gold standard approach to rejuvenating the mid-face, lower face and neck. It may be performed in isolation, or combined with other procedures to rejuvenate the eyes and forehead, and with non-surgical treatments to freshen the skin and reduce fine wrinkles.

#### What can the procedure achieve?

A facelift can make you look younger, more lively and more cheerful. Consequently, it can have real benefits for your self-esteem.

The effect of a facelift is to make patients look significantly younger by reversing the effects of gravity on the lower face and neck. During a facelift procedure, the deep fat pads of the face and the muscular layer known as the SMAS will be elevated to increase the prominence of the upper cheek and reduce the nasolabial folds, the marionette lines (from the corner of the mouth down to the chin) and the jowls. In addition, a facelift procedure can be modified to address excessive fat deposits in the neck and laxity of the neck muscles. This improves the contour of the neck. Fine wrinkling will be reduced but not eliminated.

#### What does the procedure involve?

There are many different types of face lift and it is an evolving field in plastic surgery with new approaches and techniques being presented regularly. Some of the most complex techniques are designed to improve the longevity of the results, without compromising the initial effect. However, these are normally associated with a higher complication rate and a prolonged recovery period.

The operation is normally carried out under general anaesthetic but can be performed under local anaesthetic with light sedation depending upon your circumstances.

A classic facelift uses an incision above the hair line at your temple, extending down just in front of your ear and around and behind your earlobe. Through this incision, the cheek skin is elevated and the deeper layers of the face are exposed. The deep layer of tissue known as the SMAS, which contains the facial muscles, is elevated and secured in front of and behind the ears. Fat along the chin and jaw line can be removed at the same time. The platysma muscle of the neck may be tightened or divided to improve the neck contour and eliminate the vertical banding of the skin on the neck. Finally, the skin is re-draped and any excess is removed before the wound is stitched closed.

Other forms of facelift such as the limited access (MACS) facelift involve shorter incisions principally confined to the front of the ear. The SMAS layer is elevated with internal sutures. This procedure is best suited for the younger patient with little or no skin excess, or when the purpose is to refresh the mid-face only.

Drains may be placed beneath the cheek skin to remove any excess fluid and these are normally removed on the day following surgery. Most surgeons will also bandage the face to minimise bruising and swelling. These bandages will be kept on for one or two days and the sutures are removed at four to eight days.

The overall effect of a facelift is similar but not identical to manually lifting your skin while you are looking in a mirror. The purpose of the operation is to turn back the clock. We aim for a natural refreshed appearance and not a tight, pulled or operated look.

A facelift can be combined with other operations such as an eyebrow lift, an eyelid reduction, fat transfer and lip enhancement to help achieve a better overall result.

## What is right for me?

A facelift is a cosmetic procedure. Nobody needs a facelift, however some people feel that they wish to look fresher, brighter and perhaps younger. A variety of procedures are available to help achieve these goals.

These procedures range from non-cosmetic enhancement with filler and Botox for example, to chemical peel and LASER, and brow and eyelid surgery. Then to the more complex procedures such as a full facelift. Clearly, a facelift is a greater undertaking and involves a greater commitment on behalf of the patient because of the relatively long operating and recovery time and also the increased risk. Your surgeon will advise you on the procedures most likely to achieve the results you desire.

There is no standard age for a facelift; it is an individual decision. However, if you are not sure, then there is no harm in deferring and perhaps having a simpler procedure in the meantime.

If you feel you are ready for a facelift, take time to examine your face and decide what features you would like addressed. Discuss these carefully with your surgeon. Although a facelift is a 'classic' plastic surgical procedure, the technique can be altered and other procedures such as liposuction, fat injection and brow lifts can be offered to 'tailor' the procedure as required.

Remember, a facelift will not last forever. Famously, some film stars have had multiple facelifts over many years. Repeated procedures are not for the majority of people, however, and therefore timing is important.

## What are the limitations?

A facelift addresses the mid to lower face and neck. It will not correct sagging eyebrows, eyelids or reduce wrinkles around the eyes or forehead. It can, however, be combined with other procedures to address these areas.

Although a facelift is likely to succeed in 'turning back the clock' it cannot stop it. Your face will continue to age as normal. The results of the procedure depend on many individual factors and your surgeon will discuss these with you in detail and let you know what can realistically be achieved.

Smoking and sun exposure accelerate the ageing process. This means the beneficial effects of a facelift may be lost earlier.

## What are the risks?

As with any major operation under general anaesthetic, there is a small risk of chest infection and thrombosis in the veins in your legs (DVT). While you may be given preventive treatment to reduce these risks, you can help to reduce your risk by stopping smoking. Coming off the contraceptive pill before your operation will also reduce your risk but you should not have cosmetic surgery if you are at any risk of being pregnant.

### Bleeding

Bleeding occurs during every surgical procedure. Your surgeon will carefully coagulate the small blood vessels at the time of the procedure and will not complete the operation until the area is dry. Occasionally however, bleeding will occur after the operation and a clot of blood, known as a haematoma will form under the skin. This may necessitate a return to the operating theatre to evacuate the clot and stop the bleeding.

Let your surgeon know if you take aspirin, warfarin or any anti-inflammatory medications which thin your blood. You must also let your surgeon know if you have a medical condition, such as high blood pressure or a smoker's cough, as these make formation of a blood clot more common.

### Swelling and infection

Swelling and some bruising is inevitable after a facelift. In addition, fluid (seroma) may collect under the skin which needs to be drained by needle in the clinic. Infection is a potential risk with any operation and may necessitate a course of antibiotics.

### Delayed healing

A facelift procedure involves undermining the skin of the face. Occasionally an area of skin may lose sufficient blood supply and break down. This uncommon event would lead to delayed healing and a requirement for dressings, particularly behind the ear. This complication is slightly more common in smokers.

### Other

The face is rich in nerves and muscles. Some nerves are present to make the muscles to work and others give feeling to the face and ear. As the skin of the face is undermined and lifted, some reduced sensation in the skin is inevitable but almost always recovers. There is a small risk of bruising around a nerve or injury to a nerve resulting in altered sensation to a part of the face (for example the ear) or muscle weakness. The majority of such problems recover with time.

Your surgeon will be careful to lift your face in a symmetrical fashion. However, no person has an exactly symmetrical face and there is a small risk of further asymmetry after a facelift. With any cosmetic operation a small number of patients feel that the result does not meet their expectations. It is therefore important to know what the risks are and to accept the limitations of what can be achieved.

## What can I expect afterwards?

After your surgery, there is usually some bruising of the cheeks and with gravity this tends to descend into the neck. Discomfort is usually mild for 24 to 48 hours and can be controlled with paracetamol. It is normal for there to be some numbness of the skin of the cheeks and ears. This will usually disappear in a few weeks or months. It is better to keep the head elevated for a couple of days following surgery to reduce swelling. Drainage tubes, if used, will be removed a day or two after surgery. You should avoid strenuous activity, saunas and massage for at least two weeks. Gentle mobilisation is encouraged after surgery but exaggerated movements of the head should be avoided to reduce the risk of soft tissue bleeding.

Initially, your face will look a little puffy and may feel rather strange and stiff. The scars can be very well hidden by women with their hair and disc-shaped earrings. This allows them to resume work and social activities within a couple of weeks. Camouflage make-up can help hide the bruising.

Men find it more difficult to disguise the scars and will need to shave their beard closer to the ear in front, as well as behind the ear, where the skin has been lifted.

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The scars within the hair do not usually show when healed. There may be a slight reduction in hair growth in the temples but this is not usually a problem unless the hair is very thin and repeated facelifts have been carried out.

Depending on your surgeon's preference, you may be advised to take your head dressing off at home the day before you come for your first appointment visit. Once the dressing is removed, you can wash your hair with a mild shampoo. When shampooing, avoid hanging your head down and using a hair dryer on a hot setting, as your skin will be numb for a while and you could burn yourself.

Suture removal will start around the fourth post-operative day and all sutures will be removed by seven to nine days. There is a very good blood supply to the face and your scars should settle down quickly. You should avoid exposing your scars to direct sunlight for several weeks after surgery and use a sun block. You can wear make-up before your first visit appointment but keep it away from the stitches.

You should take it easy for the first couple of weeks following a facelift procedure. Depending on the nature of your work and the type of procedure you have had done, you may return to work when you are comfortable and after the sutures have been removed.

## Contact Us

For information and appointments please contact us and we will be happy to help.

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