



A Cut Above

New and improved facelift techniques are increasingly addressing what fillers can't. By WENDY SCHMID

GET A DERMATOLOGIST OR SURGEON TALKING ABOUT THE AGING FACE and you may be transported to high school math class. Facial dimensions are reduced to geometry, which quickly paints a clear, albeit undesirable picture. “A youthful face is like an inverted triangle, with a wider brow and cheek area and a narrower chin and jaw,” says Beverly Hills dermatologist Dr. Harold Lancer. “With age, that triangle flips and fullness goes to the lower region of the face.” Since the onset of injectable fillers, a common approach is to try to re-flip that script by pumping volume back into the face. But sagging skin and slackening muscle are also part of the equation and injectables do little to create real lift. In fact, too much filler can further throw off the balance of a face. Like the telltale signs of excessive Botox (bunny lines, oddly peaked eyebrows), overdone filler is hard to miss. It can give the mid-to-lower face disproportionate heft. “Hyaluronic acid fillers are commonly used to frame the areas around the mouth—the nasolabial folds and marionette lines—but it requires a gentle hand,” says plastic surgeon Dr. Trevor Born, who practices in Toronto and Manhattan. “There’s a lot of overfilling going on, which leads to misshapen, thick-looking faces.” Crack open any *US Weekly* for evidence of this: in candid snaps, many older actresses strangely lack the natural smile lines of younger ones. “The camera really picks it up,” says Born. “If there’s no natural contour near the mouth due to over-injecting, it distorts the face and looks weird, not beautiful.”

“Overfilling is an unbelievable problem,” agrees Beverly Hills plastic surgeon Dr. Brian Novack, who often works with Lancer to correct such cases. “Carefully injecting one to two CCs over the course of a year is one thing. But doctors are injecting six to seven CCs every eight to 10 weeks. It actually makes the patient look older.” Few would sign up for that, but docs say there’s a lack of patient education about the lim-

itations of fillers. “Part of the issue is that fillers are presented as an alternative to surgery, which they’re not,” says Born. Adds Toronto-based plastic surgeon Dr. Frank Lista, “Patients like non-invasive options, but at some point a doctor needs to be able to say, ‘More filler won’t make you look better. This problem can only be addressed by surgery.’”

In an age of quick fixes, that may sound like a hard sell, but facelift surgery has come a long way. In the past, a facelift (or rhytidectomy) was a lengthy operation that could send a person into hiding for two months. Now, procedures are shorter and minor bruising can be hidden with foundation after about two weeks. “The operation has gone from a multi-plane or deep-lift procedure to a more limited approach with fewer incisions,” says Lista. “Traditionally, many layers were separated and lifted—the skin, the tissue around the muscle layer [SMAS] and»

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the deep muscle layer—sometimes down to the bone. Today, we suture the SMAS layer back into a more youthful position without separating as many planes of tissue.”

This translates to less downtime and fewer risks, such as nerve damage or a “lateral sweep” (an unnatural banding of the skin that runs from the corner of the mouth to the earlobe). The “pulled” look is the result of doctors doing just that—aggressively pulling the skin up and back in one direction, now an outmoded practice. Novack, who is rumoured to be behind Demi Moore’s work, says the current technique is about face tightening. “The secret is, I’m not pulling any faces. I’m tightening the SMAS, that facial envelope around the muscles, in order to rejuvenate the face to its original dimensions.”

To address volume loss, doctors are also taking a “3-D” approach, using micro-fat grafting. “Before making any incisions, a small amount of fat is taken from the abdomen and injected using a microcannula to help re-establish the shape of the face and offset any hollowing near the temples, eyes, mouth and jawline,” says Born, who like many pros feels that using your own tissue for filler is ideal.

Whether you’re getting a full facelift (from neck to brow) or a mini lift (focusing on the mid-face and jawline), incisions are now shorter, resulting in a “short scar” lift. “If you let the incisions heal without tension, which is very important, then they’re invisible,” says Novack. “And I don’t mean virtually invisible. I mean they cannot be detected.” (Good news for celebs under the scrutiny of a high-def lens, or anyone who wants to keep their work to themselves.)

In the past few years, a high-tech device used in neuro and thoracic medicine has moved into the facelift arena. The Harmonic device, developed by Johnson & Johnson, gently separates tissue after scalpel incisions are made. “It vibrates 50,000 times a second with

ultrasound, sealing off the blood vessels as it works, so there’s less bruising, less potential damage to the tissue and faster recovery time,” says Dr. Marc Mani, the only plastic surgeon in the cosmetic-surgery epicentre that is L.A. who offers the technology for facelifts.

These advances are drawing a younger crowd. Toronto head and neck surgeon Dr. Philip Solomon says women are doing facelifts earlier than ever. “Patients in their mid-to-late-40s often prefer not to wait until they’ve experienced significant aging. They want to stay looking young.” (In Hollywood, the kick-off age is creeping down to the late 30s). Some think early lifting is better because the tissues are more resilient, but surgery is still surgery. Docs warn that while you may be presentable at two weeks, full healing can take up to a month. The point at which surgery becomes a good option

depends on a variety of factors. “Skin type, natural bone structure and lifestyle habits like exercise, sun exposure and smoking play a role in how you age,” notes Solomon.

Katie Meyer*, a Los Angeles publicist, didn’t feel she needed a lift until

she turned 63. She’d seen a gradual downward shift: her cheeks drooped, her lower jaw became lax and her neck softened. “It drove me nuts so I knew it was time.” Lured by the promise of less bruising and downtime, she opted for the Harmonic Lift. “The thing about a facelift is that we all fear looking ‘done,’ but we also expect to look transformed,” Meyer says. “Afterwards, I had no more aging neck, saggy apple cheeks or soft jawline, but I was surprised my results were so subtle and natural.” Lista confirms that there may be a less pronounced change with current techniques. But few—including Meyer, who is thrilled with her result two years later—see this as a downside. “A more modest change is more natural-looking,” says Lista. “And these newer facelifts can still turn back the clock by 10 to 15 years.” □

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* NAME HAS BEEN CHANGED

