

What happens to the face with age?

As the elastic tissue of the skin weakens with age, lines deepen around the mouth and between the eyebrows. Wrinkles start appearing on the forehead. The eyebrows sag and the eyelids droop. Loss of fatty tissue from under the skin just like in extensive weight loss will cause the skin to become loose from the underlying muscles. A "turkey goblet" appears under the chin. Skin sagging is quite prominent along the border of the lower jaw producing the so-called "jowls". Muscle bands are more prominent in the neck. Cheek bones are flatter and the face more squarish. The nose becomes longer and thinner and the nasal tip drops. Fine wrinkles appear on the side of the eye lids, "crow's feet," and around the lips.

Factors that affect the aging process are genetic, hormonal, skin type and texture, over exposure to the sun and elements, and general health. The misconception of skin softening creams and cosmetics retarding the aging process is widespread among the general population. Although they can be beneficial to keep the skin healthy the structural changes that go below are however not affected. Skin support and facial muscle exercises are worthless.

What does a face lift accomplish?

The aging process is irreversible. A face lift and associated facial surgery can turn the clock back many years but does not stop the aging process. A better understanding of the facial anatomy has permitted refinement in the technique of a face lift operation. Tightening or resection of the platysma muscle in the neck and the "SMAS" (superficial muscular aponeurotic system) in the face, allows a better support to the overlying skin, creating a more pleasing and longer lasting result. In ideal cases improvement may last from 5-10 years.

Where are the incisions placed?

The face lift can be generally divided into three components: the neck lift, the cheek lift and the temporal lift. A patient may require one, two or all three components. In some patients a small incision under the chin is necessary to perform a submental lipectomy to remove excessive fat under the chin and tuck the platysma muscle.

What kind of anesthesia is given?

Intravenous sedation combined with local anesthesia has been found to be the safest and most efficient way of performing the surgery with minimal amount of bleeding and discomfort. General anesthesia might be advisable in some patients.

How long is the operation?

The length of the operation varies from about two hours for a face lift to three hours if eyelids are also operated on, and possibly longer if other procedures such as forehead, eyebrow lift or nose surgery are performed. The patient will spend then a few hours in the recovery following the surgery.

What happens during the immediate post-operative period?

Pressure bandages are applied around the face and neck and are removed in 2 to 4 days following surgery. Analgesics are given if any discomfort is present. Head elevation and limitation of undue facial motion such as chewing, excessive talking, and laughing are advised.

When are the sutures removed?

Sutures in front of the ears are removed one week post-operatively and the sutures inside the hair 3 to 4 days later.

When can I wash my hair?

The hair can be washed and rinsed the same day the bandages are removed, and tinting can be performed 3 weeks following surgery.

When can make-up be applied?

Cover-up make-up can be used over bruises when the bandages are removed. Light make-up may be applied over the incisions when all sutures have been removed 10 days following surgery. At that time the patient would look presentable enough to resume non-physical daily activities.

What are the complications?

Although swelling and bruising are normal following face lift surgery, excessive swelling could be quite uncomfortable and disturbing. Loosening the bandages most usually helps the situation. Blood collection under the skin can be evacuated and drained. A weakness in the motion of the facial muscles is usually temporary and gradually subsides without permanent change, as would numbness or tension in the cheeks or neck, infection is quite rare in facial surgery and is treated appropriately with antibiotics if it happens. Skin loss behind the ears is quite uncommon and usually heals well on conservative treatment.

What is a touch-up operation?

If the skin laxity occurs within a few months after the face-life surgery a secondary "touch-up" procedure can then be performed.