

Understanding Office-Based Plastic Surgery... Avoiding Disappointment in Face-Lifts

"To many patients seeking cosmetic enhancement, the road to happiness is paved with twists and turns. Conflicting information, non-standardized pertinent resources, and over-promising marketing schemes can leave consumers confused and frustrated. Although people often know the basic idea behind a surgical procedure, there is often a misunderstanding about the extent of a single procedure's effect. This can make the appropriate choices sometimes hard to make. One such operation is the face-lift, or *rhytidectomy*," says Richard Westreich, MD.

"In my office, patients will often ask: 'Doctor, do you think I need a face-lift?' while pulling up their cheeks. (This maneuver produces an aesthetic change that can only be partially surgically reproduced). Although I enjoy educating patients about facial plastic surgery, my preference is to allow people to make their own decisions about their bodies. So, here are some basic concepts to consider if you are thinking about a facelift," notes the doctor.

"The face is generally viewed in three separate segments: the upper, middle, and lower thirds. The boundary between these areas are the bridge of the nose and the bottom of the nose. Generally speaking, face-lifting operations have the most dramatic effect on the lower third of the face and the neck, which corresponds to the areas surrounding the mouth, jaw-line, and chin. These areas, in particular are effectively treated with this particular operation. The gray-zone, so to speak, is the cheeks and their associated nasolabial folds (also known as "smile lines"). This is the area of the "cheek pull" maneuver.

"The 'smile lines' lie along the border of the lower and middle third—about 50/50 on either side. Traditional face-lifting operations can have modest effects in these

areas, but they tend to last 1-2 years at most. Surgical results in the neck and jaw-line are more durable, with a shelf life of 5-10 years. The best way to demonstrate these changes is to place your fingers on the upper neck and jaw angle and then push back and up towards the ear lobes.

"Why do we obsess with these nasolabial folds? The goal of plastic surgeons is the creation of balance and harmony, which can provide the appearance of youth. Therefore, this area represents an obvious transition zone. As you can imagine (and also see on a Sunday stroll up Madison avenue) isolated enhancement of the lower facial third, without middle and upper third balance, can sometimes result in a very "operated" appearance.

"More recent applications of endoscopic surgery have allowed for increased surgical options relating to rejuvenation of the middle and upper thirds, or midface and forehead. These procedures, a subject in and of

themselves, can provide increased balance, harmony, fullness to the cheek and lower eyelid areas, and upper eyelid rejuvenation. This can give a very natural appearance when done in the proper setting.

"On the other hand, some patients do not need any formal surgical procedure. Their desires and motivations, as well as age, can be the deciding factors. For example, a close relative of mine recently asked if I thought she needed a face-lift. I responded with several questions and found out that her concerns were mostly related to deepening nasolabial folds, pigment problems, and her skin's overall texture. I recommended a medium depth chemical peel and Restylane injections. Six months later, she couldn't be happier.

"So, what is the lesson here? As in all aspects of facial plastic surgery, one size shoe does not fit all feet. One person's perfect Jimmy Choo is another's pair of future foot ache. The face-lift represents only a



Richard Westreich, MD

single component within a growing list of options for facial rejuvenation. Speak to your doctor. The fact lift can be a wonderful procedure that helps to enhance overall appearance. However, it can produce very disappointed patients who are left wondering: "did I ask the right questions?"

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