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**BAN THE
KNIFE
THE FACELIFT
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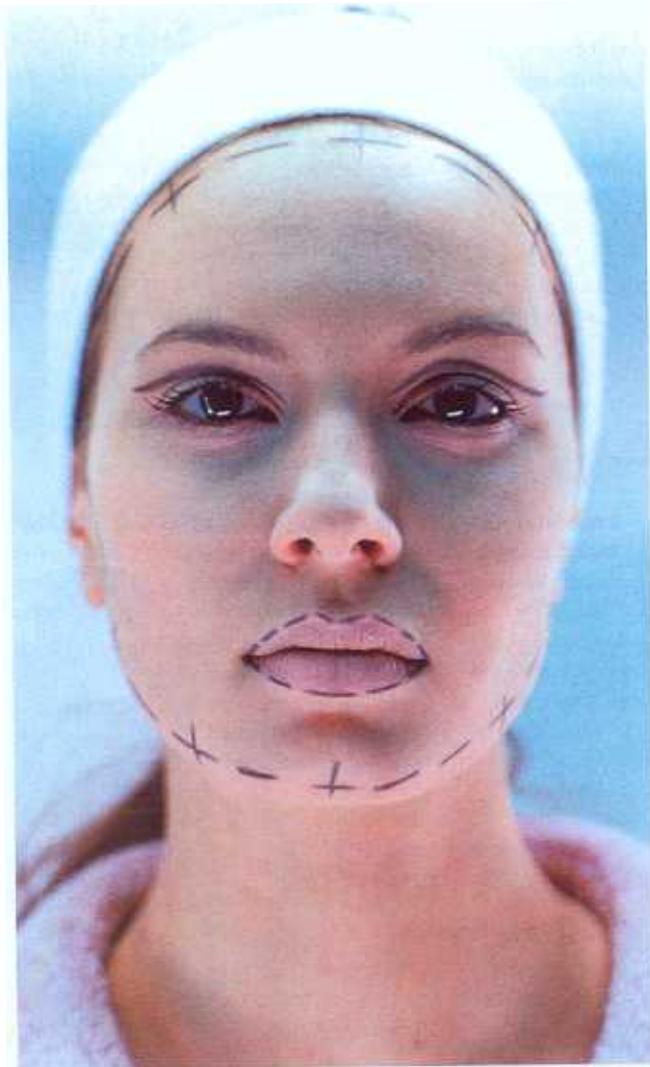


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well being

HOLD THAT KNIFE The facelift gets a facelift, as nips and tucks become a thing of the past with the advent of non-invasive procedures. But is getting a 'natural' facelift as easy as you think, asks Angela Braden?



You've seen her grace the silver screen for as long as you can remember, but over the past decade or so, that gorgeous movie star just doesn't seem to ever look any older ... ever. Admittedly, you've pondered what her exotic, anti-aging remedy must be or you simply chalk it up to the unobtainable luxury of facelifts that we in the real world have neither time nor inclination for. Wait. Hold that thought. Plastic surgeons are bringing incredible advances to this ultimate remedy to the ageing face and achieving dramatic, lasting improvement with a mere seven-day downtime.

Suddenly, the facelift seems a more reasonable or even standard procedure. After all, how could anything that heals in a week still be considered an extreme measure? And with only six or seven days out of the office, who would even have to know for sure what you did? Your friends, who were once closet collagen addicts have come to embrace all those "minimally-invasive" procedures (a Botox injection here, a laser facial there), but the facelift still has a bit of a stigma attached to it.

■ MAXIMUM INVASION, MAXIMUM RESULTS

As reality would have it, "maximally-invasive" techniques – Deep Plane or Superficial Musculoaponeurotic System (SMAS) facelifts – are most effective and permanent. We may hope that a laser or another "minimally-invasive" procedure will be enough to tighten a drooping face, more often than not, "anything less than a formal, well executed surgery will not yield excellent results," explains Dr Jason Diamond, a rising star on the Los Angeles plastic surgery scene.

Diamond bottomlines the min versus max debate with the revelation that doctors tend to recommend those procedures that reflect their skill level. "The truth is, not every doctor is able to perform the more advanced facelifts," he says. "The more comfortable a surgeon becomes with more invasive procedures, the less they typically perform the 'minimally-invasive' ones. (This is) because they know the results are not as long lasting or as effective." While no downtime facelift alternatives (fillers for lines, laser facials, etc.) have been all the rage in the media over the past few years, many doctors offering them are not surgeons at all. In fact, anyone with an M.D. can legally advertise herself as a "cosmetic surgeon" even though they have not been formally trained in surgery. An anonymous board certified

plastic surgeon shares her encounters with many patients who had been "sold less optimal treatments elsewhere." She explains, "(These patients) clearly need invasive surgery to achieve their desired end result but have been sold non-surgical treatments by other 'cosmetic surgeons' who do not perform the appropriate surgeries."

Advocating non-surgical procedures also comes back to a simple case of patient demand for something that won't send their friends into a gossip frenzy. Dr Diamond says many have an aversion to the term facelift in their steadfast hope for a less invasive alternative. "Patients pull the skin along the neck and jaw line with their hands to demonstrate the result they want, but insist they do not want a facelift, though a facelift is clearly the best way and often the only way to achieve that particular result." So the influx of doctors on the "cosmetic surgery" scene may be simply responding to market demands for alternatives to the infamous facelift.

■ STUCK UP

The story doesn't stop there and neither did that annoyingly ageless movie star. Dr Marc Mani, a facial surgery specialist on Sunset Boulevard, has found the use of a natural, sticky substance called Fibrin Adhesive to reduce the recovery time of a facelift by 75 percent. "It almost completely prevents post-operative swelling, bruising and draining," says Mani. The Fibrin sealant is made from an organic substance found in blood cells – it's what causes them to stick together. Plastic surgeons like Mani are using a concentrated form of this in a fine spray to hold tissues in place as they perform the facelift. This technique not only speeds up recovery, but also makes changing the shape of the face an almost sculptural process. "The tissue is moulded into position with the aid of the (Fibrin) sealant, lending far more control over the outcome than by conventional means," Mani explains. It also has you dinner party-ready in about a week. This, combined with the use of oxygen therapy after surgery (believed to cut recovery time in half) may be the formula for a fearless facelift.

Pradeep K Sinha, MD, PhD, FACS, whose entire practice centres on customised procedures for the face, was one of the first surgeons to work with this sticky miracle spray. He contends that while certain aspects of the rejuvenation afforded by a facelift can be accomplished by other means, "if a patient needs more, a SMAS facelift is recommended." SMAS stands for Superficial Musculoaponeurotic System, the thick fibrous layer that envelops the muscles of the face. Lifting these deep layers is what gives a facelift longevity (another glorious 10-15 years to be exact). Using the Fibrin spray and an all-natural medicine called Arnica, Sinha's SMAS facelift patients are usually back at work in five to seven days.

■ PREVENTIVE MEASURES

According to the experts, less invasive procedures still do have their place in postponing the need for a facelift. One major difference between a 20-year-old face and a 40-year-old one is the loss of fat. This can be replaced using dermal fillers in clients who were previously facelift-bound. Recreating facial contours lost over time has been common fare for minimally invasive centres like Epione in Beverly Hills. But Dr Simon Ourian of Epione emphasizes the ethical practice of referral to a plastic surgeon if the results patients expect require a procedure beyond what his practice offers.

Dr Sinha regularly performs the most invasive facelifts and possesses the highest possible surgical credentials (Board Certified in Facial Plastic Surgery, Fellow of the American College of Surgeons, PhD in Physiology), but he also offers a "Virtual Facelift" as part of his practice's focus on the face. Sinha's "Virtual Facelift" is an individual plan addressing specific needs and utilising the best

■ GO DEEP

Dr Jason Diamond specializes in a specific kind of SMAS facelift referred to as Deep Plane, which is reportedly the only way to really get rid of the sagging that forms between the nose and mouth and below the cheeks. Deep Plane lifts are a type of SMAS facelift that, according to Dr Sinha, are "a little more tricky because one has to avoid some important nerves controlling facial expression in this area." When properly performed, the results are worth the difficulty – lasting rejuvenation without risking a perpetual look of surprise.

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non-invasive approaches, from microdermabrasion and chemical peels, to Botox and dermal fillers. "Virtual Facelift," he emphasises, "accomplishes general facial rejuvenation for those who are starting to show signs of aging, but does not aspire to be a replacement for those who require surgery."

Is it all a matter of being honest with ourselves about what we want to achieve and how far we are willing to go to get it? A seasoned plastic surgeon in Beverly Hills, Dr Neal Handel, offers this analogy on the subject. "If I tell you I'm hungry, you can either hand me a granola bar or get on the phone for reservations at the finest restaurant in town. You need to ask more questions to find out what my appetite is and how much I am willing to pay."

The best in the business agree, however, that advanced skills and technology have slashed that price by at least half for the most effective, most natural-looking, and longest-lasting procedure. Brace yourself, the facelift is going mainstream. ■