

What's New in Facial Plastic Surgery

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You wake up feeling great. You get dressed, have a cup of coffee and off you go to meet the world. It's a beautiful day, and you feel alive and invigorated. Then it happens — the first person you meet says, "Good morning. You look tired. Are you feeling well today?" Suddenly, your good mood evaporates.

We do not always look as young as we feel. Heredity, sun, time and skin abuse can cause our eyebrows and forehead to relax and descend. Loose skin and fatty deposits can develop around the eyelids, causing bulging and protrusions. The result can be a sad, tired or even angry appearance. Though we look into the eyes of another, it is actually the contour of the tissues around the eye, rather than the eyeball itself, which allows the eyes to convey expression and emotion.

An important part of a normal, attractive upper eyelid is the lid crease. This thin line runs less than a quarter of an inch above the edge of the upper eyelid. You can readily see this crease in children and in the youthful eyelid. With aging, a fold of skin and sometimes fat can hide this crease, making the eyes look sad or tired. In the lower eyelid, bulges of fat often occur with aging. This fat is not related to other body fat, since quantities remain relatively constant regardless of obesity or weight loss. It can be hereditary and most often bulges with age.

The procedure which corrects these conditions is known as blepharoplasty. Like many surgical techniques, it has roots in antiquity. The first mention of the technique of removing excess eyelid skin was made by Celsus, a first-century Roman. Today, it is the most commonly performed cosmetic procedure in the United States, with more than 26,000 cases performed each year.

Before scheduling a blepharoplasty, one needs a consultation with a surgeon. A good rapport between the patient and surgeon is essential. It is important that the surgeon understands the concerns and goals of the patient, and that the patient understands the specifics of the procedure. The use of a computer imaging system can be of assistance in illustrating what can be achieved through cosmetic surgery.



Preoperative patient shows effects of aging on area around eyes.



Postoperative blepharoplasty shows.

Blepharoplasty is most commonly performed in the surgeon's office or in the hospital under local anesthesia with the patient under a relaxed, sleepy twilight anesthesia. A certified anesthetist cares for the patient's sedation needs. The procedure is quite comfortable, and patients virtually never complain of discomfort if properly managed.

For the upper eyelids, the excess skin and fat are usually removed through a small incision hidden in the natural eyelid crease. Because eyelid skin is very well nourished, healing occurs quickly. For the lower eyelids, using the latest techniques, fat is usually removed through a completely hidden incision inside the lid.

Most patients return home in a few hours. Very few use more than one or two pain pills, and the majority use only Tylenol. Swelling and bruising usually disappear within the first week. Though most patients can see improvement in their condition after seven to 10 days, a minority may require two weeks before they feel comfortable in social situations.

The results of a blepharoplasty include a dramatic reduction in the unsightly excess skin and fat, thus making the eyes appear more rested and youthful. Unlike some surgical procedures, such as facelifts which provide noticeable benefit for approximately ten years, the benefits of blepharoplasty can be nearly permanent. Revision surgery is rarely needed.

Certain conditions are not eliminated by blepharoplasty alone and may require additional procedures. These conditions include crow's feet or laugh lines on the outside of the eyes, fine wrinkling of the lower eyelid skin, cheek pads, dark pigmented circles and droopy brows. These conditions require other procedures such as chemical peels, laser skin resurfacing, lid tightening procedures or brow lift. All of these can safely be performed at the same time as blepharoplasty.

National averages for the surgical fees of blepharoplasty are approximately \$1,500 for upper or lower lids and \$2,600 for upper and lower lids combined. Insurance may pay all or part of the cost of upper lid surgery if peripheral vision is impaired by sagging lids.