



THE LIQUID FACELIFT: TRADING THE KNIFE FOR THE NEEDLE

Non-surgical treatments, “the liquid facelift,” can be divided into three basic categories: muscle relaxers, volumizers (fillers), and skin smoothers

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Baby Boomers aren't willing to age gracefully, and Generation X doesn't want to age at all! They live in a youth-oriented, fast-paced world, where “downtime” is a dirty word. This is why gyms are crowded, dieting has become an industry, and cosmetic enhancement is now commonplace.

Fewer people are waiting to age to the point where total facial rejuvenation surgery (“the facelift”) is their only choice. Individuals are looking for options earlier, and with less recuperation. People are choosing the needle over the knife: They are seeking rejuvenation that comes out of a bottle.

Plastic surgeons have heeded that call; and, with an evolution in thinking about what contributes to facial aging, are able to offer options previously unavailable. Once upon a time, facial rejuvenation meant only cutting and pulling; now it includes repositioning, revolumizing, and resurfacing—possibilities available with Botox, fillers, and peels.

How is this possible? What changed?

First and foremost came the understanding that a loss in volume is the cardinal event in the onset of facial aging. Youthful faces are full, smooth, and well hydrated. With aging comes a loss in elasticity, volume, and moisture, leading to wrinkles and sagging.

When non-surgical treatments entered the lexicon of aesthetic enhancement, they were geared toward eliminating lines. This had limited goals and limited success. With time and analysis and “thinking out of the box,” it became clear that more could be done—facial anatomy could be revitalized and even reshaped“.”

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Muscle relaxers

The best known muscle relaxer is Botox. This is the brand name for botulinum toxin, a drug with a long history of use in blocking muscle activity. Originally used in treating muscle spasms, it was noted to smooth lines and wrinkles as the muscles beneath relaxed. Botox Cosmetic was branded for aesthetic use and initially used to decrease the lines between the eyes. With the understanding of muscle activity in the face, it became clear that Botox could be used to enhance facial balance. By blocking certain muscles and allowing unopposed action on others, eyebrows could be raised and smiles improved, in addition to erasing frown lines,

smoker’s lines, and crow’s feet.

Once patients experience the immediate gratification achieved with this simple in-office treatment, they will not return to their former look. Tired eyes become rested, angry forehead furrows disappear, and frowns become smiles.

The popularity of Botox has led other companies to pursue similar competitive products. Look for Myobloc, Reloxin, and PureTox to be available in the near future.

Volumizers

These products were once known as “fillers.” The most famous was collagen, and the most infamous was silicone. These were introduced to fill lines and creases. The problems were that collagen required a skin test because of potential allergies and was very temporary at best, and silicone was permanent and known to migrate, creating unwanted effects.

The recognition that fillers had a place in aesthetics led companies to develop safe, non-allergic products that could do more than just act as “skin spackle”—they could actually reshape by selective volume expansion, recreating heart-shaped faces and full lips. Many products are competing in this “race for space,” and more will soon be introduced. For most purposes there are three basic groups of fillers. All are injected, all can cause some bruising, and all are considered temporary, although with repeated treatments collagen is formed leading to fewer visits and

less product needed.

HYALURONIC ACIDS: These are naturally occurring substances in the body that are hydrophilic—meaning they attract water like a sponge—and therefore increase volume where placed. The most commonly known are Restylane and Juvederm. There are subtle differences between these two, but they basically perform similarly. Initially introduced to decrease the nasolabial fold, their uses have expanded to fill and shape the lips, enhance the cheeks, and camouflage the bags under the eyes. Has are a great way to try out volumizer treatments. They are easily injected, and in spite of company claims may last between four (for lips) and 12 months. If there is a problem with the treatment, hyaluronidase is an “antidote” that can be injected to dissolve it. Topical anesthesia is often all that is needed. Swelling lasts about 24 hours and is minimized with cool compresses.

DENSE MATERIALS: Products like Radiesse and Evolence have been developed to reshape the face and are considered as alternatives to fat injections (a surgical procedure). These materials are longer lasting than the HAs, and are well suited to augment the cheeks and chin as well as the eyebrows. Radiesse is a “calcium-based microsphere suspended in a natural gel.” Evolence is a neutralized, non-allergic, and “kosherized” pig collagen, actually made in Israel. Both products are “what you see



The Liquid Facelift: Botox to the forehead and eye area; volumizers to the cheeks, midface, and chin; skin care to the face

therapies to treat HIV patients. The results were dramatic and the aesthetic benefits obvious, leading its company to seek FDA approval for cosmetic usage. Sculptra is a wonderful treatment for faces that require “global” volumization as opposed to isolated filling. It works by stimulating the collagen in the skin but takes time to see the results. In this way it is not a traditional “instant gratification” filler. Several treatment sessions spread out over months is the norm for maximum benefit. Sculptra has been shown to last up to three years because long after the product is gone the stimulated collagen remains.

Skin smoothers

The quality of aging skin can be improved and younger skin maintained by selective use of skin therapies including chemical peels. The types of skin products are classified as over the counter and medicinal. Those applied by the physician are stronger in effect. Peels can be superficial, medium, or deep. Their effects are very similar to those achieved by lasers. Peels are administered by aestheticians or physicians—usually based upon depth. The deeper the peel, the greater the result and the longer the downtime. Common peel therapies include AHA (alpha hydroxyl— fruit acid) superficial peels, TCA (trichloroacetic acid) medium depth, and the phenol-croton oil deep peel

Skin peels, along with Retin-A, oxygen and Vitamin C facials, and micro-dermabrasions can go a long way in decreasing sun-damaged skin.

When considering non-surgical facial rejuvenation, a patient should be open to the potential for multiple modalities and multiple treatment sessions. The liquid facelift is more than just one tube of filler or Botox or one skin treatment. Many times different volumizers will be used on different parts of the face at different times in conjunction with Botox and skin care regimens.

These rejuvenating therapies are non-invasive, relatively pain free, very effective, and highly gratifying to both patient and doctor. Like a good hairstyle or a fit body, liquid facelifts must be maintained for long-lasting results.

It must be clearly stated that thoughtful consultations and individualizations of treatments are key to successful outcomes. It is not “one size fits all”—and indeed, some patients will in fact require surgery for optimal outcomes. Not everyone can benefit from the liquid facelift. When considering the needle over the knife, you and your surgeon must have a well-understood and mutual work plan in order to then make that plan work. **IMAGE**

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is what you get” as far as volume. They can last between 12 and 18 months. Because of their density, these injections can be uncomfortable. I will perform nerve blocks to anesthetize the sites for treatment and add local anesthesia to the injectable material.

PANFACIAL COLLAGEN STIMULATORS: This is a new class of volumizer that does more than merely fill a space—it actually stimulates the collagen of the skin to increase in density. Sculptra, a poly-lactic acid, was originally developed as a way to increase the volume in faces wasted by the drug