

(Parkland Life Column for April 2007)

## Lip Augmentation Can Counter Age-Related Volume Loss

By David J. Levens, MD, PA, FACS

Angelina Jolie's highly accentuated lips may be her (natural?) trademark, but most women considering lip augmentation aren't seeking a stylized ultra-pout. Typically, they are aged 35-64 and want to enhance genetically thin lips, or correct thinning and sagging caused by aging. Performed improperly however, lip augmentation can yield quite unaesthetic results. One tenet for both the physician and patient to remember is natural balance and proportion (e.g. the normal ratio of upper to lower lip fullness is 2:3, although an unnaturally overfilled upper lip is often seen).

Depending on the patient's needs and goals, there are several options.

Least invasive are the **injectable soft tissue fillers** and there is a range of products to choose from. Hyaluronic acid fillers such as Restylane are probably the most popular for lips today, with results typically lasting 4 months or more. Radiesse, a more durable synthetic filler, can last 1 year or more, but is not recommended for the lips due to a tendency to form small lumps in this area (it is however a very good filler for other facial areas). Collagen had been a standard treatment, however the occasional sensitivity reaction and a shorter longevity have led to its replacement with the newer fillers. Fat injections (utilizing the patient's own fat) are another traditional approach, but require obtaining fat as through liposuction (often combined with a planned liposuction procedure) and the duration of the results can be unpredictable, from months to years.

The injection technique and overall patient experience is similar for most injectable fillers. A tiny needle is inserted at one or more sites; patients experience little or no discomfort; the procedure usually takes only a few minutes. While most patients return to work immediately, some take a day or two off.

Besides plumping up the lips themselves, injectable fillers are sometimes used in conjunction with peels or dermabrasion to treat areas surrounding the lips, such as laugh lines and tiny vertical lines (lipstick "bleed lines") above the upper lip. Finally, BOTOX can be utilized as an adjunct to selectively weaken some of the muscles around the lips, thus contributing to a "pouty" appearance.

Patients seeking a more permanent solution than injectables provide might consider **surgical implants**. Demand for surgical lip augmentation is on the rise, according to national surveys. Nearly 26,000 non-injectable procedures were performed in 2005. un

39% from 2000. As with fillers, a variety of materials are available for implants, ranging from the patient's own skin from other parts of the body, treated donor skin, or synthetic products such as Gore-Tex material.

Incisions for lip implants are small and inconspicuous, made inside the corners of the mouth. Implant material is usually rolled or shaped into tubes and positioned with a special insertion instrument. With time, the implants become integrated with the patient's own tissue. The procedure takes less than one hour. Local anesthesia can be utilized. Talking and chewing should be limited during the first few days of recovery while cold packs are applied. Patients typically return to work in 5-7 days. Lip enhancement surgery is often done in conjunction with other surgical procedures of the face such as facelift.

A third option is a **lip lift**, which is appropriate when aging has widened the space between the nose and the notch of the upper lip, or when the upper lip has become saggy with down-turned corners. Though lip lift procedures differ, depending on the patient's facial anatomy, the most common technique for lifting the upper lip involves surgical removal of a small wedge of skin beneath the nose to shorten the space between nose and upper lip.

To lift the lower lip, one or more tiny incisions are made within the wet part of the lower lip and the lip is pulled upward. A corner lip lift is done to correct down-turned lips. Incisions are made at the very outer edge of the upper lip. Like lip implant surgery, local anesthesia can be used for lip lifts, but recovery time is longer due to the longer incisions.

Lip enhancement and rejuvenation of areas around the mouth, combined or separately, can give the face a significantly younger looking appearance. However, whichever approach is chosen, it is important that the patient be made aware of possible risks and potential complications, not only with surgical procedures but with fillers as well. Thoroughly informed patients usually have the best outcomes and the best recovery experiences. #

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