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Non-Surgical “Facelifts”: Fact versus Fiction

By David J. Levens, MD, PA, FACS

It's early December--too late to schedule a surgical lift of the face, brows or eyelids and be sufficiently recovered to show off the results at that special New Year's Eve party. Yet there is still time to start the New Year with a significantly refreshed look which can be achieved from a so-called “non-surgical lift”.

Known by various names, a non-surgical lift is typically a **combination of several treatments**, performed in the plastic surgeon's office requiring only topical or local anesthesia and little downtime. Some bruising or swelling can occur but positive results can be noted immediately.

Here's what a non-surgical lift **cannot** achieve: Elimination of excess, sagging skin at the jaw line; reduction of deep facial wrinkles; reduction of excess skin or fat beneath the chin; elimination of “banding” of the neck; upper/lower eyelid improvement if there are large amounts of excess skin, or correction of very droopy eyebrows. Only traditional surgical procedures can achieve these goals.

However, for patients who do not have significant loose skin, a non-surgical lift **can** achieve a great deal, depending on the patient and the specific treatments used. Some examples: Reduction of frown lines, crow's feet, laugh lines, marionette creases and fine lines above the upper lip; reduction of age spots, fine lines and other texture irregularities; reduction of the appearance of under-eye “bags” and overly hollow cheeks; creation of the appearance of higher, more prominent cheekbones or a fuller more youthful brow, and an overall firmer, smoother skin tone.

The treatments used to achieve these goals vary, but generally include injectable facials fillers, injectable muscle relaxants and peels.

Botox® and the newer Dysport® are injected into underlying muscles to prevent frowning, squinting and eyebrow raising which cause frown lines, forehead lines, “crow's feet” lines and sometimes to improve lines around the lips. Without frequent contracting, the skin is able to relax and un wrinkle. If the creases are deep, filler such as Restylane®, Radiesse™, Sculptra® or Juvederm™ can be used for added improvement.

Fillers can also camouflage under-eye puffiness. A tiny needle is used to carefully place the filler material into the tear trough between the nose and under eye/ upper cheek area just where the puffiness stops, raising the sunken contour between the lower lid and upper cheek, making the “bags” seem to disappear. Fillers are used to plump up cheeks which have become hollow or sunken, creating the impression of fuller, more youthful cheekbones. Injecting fillers into creases between the nose and mouth, and mouth and chin can significantly reduce the appearance of laugh lines and marionette lines. For minor skin sagging, “jowls”, along the jaw line, fillers can be injected deeply to even out the contour and reduce the perception of the jowl. “Smoker’s lines” above the upper lip can be treated with a combination of fillers and muscle relaxants, while also creating a subtle lift in the upper lip and making it look fuller. Lip volume can be enhanced, usually with a hyaluronic acid- type filler. Various kinds of peels, such as the newer VI Peel, can be performed and produce significant improvements in skin color, texture and tone, with minimal downtime.

Of course, none of these non-surgical treatments can create as long term improvement as a surgical lift. Depending on the specific treatment, results typically last from 6-12 months. But for a pre-holiday “quick fix”, these **combination approaches** can be ideal.

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