Facelift (meloplasty)
A facelift (also known as meloplasty or rhytidectomy) is cosmetic surgery to remove excess skin and reduce signs of ageing in the face and neck. While a facelift can make you look younger, it will not raise sagging eyebrows, remove deep frown lines in your forehead, change your upper or lower eyelids, or get rid of wrinkles around your mouth.

Scarring will be permanent with most types of facelift, but should fade in time.

Talk with your surgeon about the risks and benefits of a facelift and what results you can expect.

A facelift can reduce flabby jowls and smooth the jawline. Most people find that they look younger after a facelift. The scars of the operation will be permanent, although they are generally hidden – usually by your hair. A suture facelift (thread lift) can tighten or smooth out the skin around the eyes, cheeks or chin. This treatment will leave no obvious scars, but will not dramatically alter your facial shape.

Other treatments often performed along with a facelift are a brow or forehead lift (to correct a sagging or deeply furrowed brow), and eyelid surgery to rejuvenate ageing eyes.

If you are concerned about the way you look or are thinking about cosmetic treatments to boost your confidence, there are alternatives. These may include other surgical and non-surgical treatments, or accepting yourself the way you are.

**Things to consider before deciding to have a facelift**

Before you opt for a facelift, some important issues to keep in mind include:

- While a facelift should make you look younger, it will not raise sagging eyebrows, remove deep frown lines in the forehead, change your upper or lower eyelids, or get rid of wrinkles around the mouth.
- Suture facelift, or thread lifting, is best suited to younger and middle-aged patients whose tissues have sagged with time or sun damage. It is not recommended for people with very thin or dry skin. Your surgeon will need to assess your individual suitability for this type of treatment.
- Think about the financial cost. Cosmetic surgery does not usually qualify for rebates from Medicare or private health insurance companies.
- Smokers are at increased risk of complications. If you are serious about undergoing surgery, you should try to quit smoking.

**Finding a cosmetic surgeon**

Ask your doctor for advice on a suitable specialist surgeon or hospital where facelift surgery is performed. At your first consultation, you should ask the surgeon about their training and experience.

It is preferable to have this procedure done by a surgeon who is specially trained to perform facelift surgery and has a lot of experience in carrying out this type of surgery.

**Medical issues and having a facelift**

Before the operation, you need to discuss a range of medical issues with your doctor or surgeon. They will talk to you about your:

- Physical health – an examination will help your doctor or surgeon decide if the treatment is appropriate.
- Medical history – some pre-existing medical conditions and surgery you’ve had in the past may influence decisions about this operation, including the type of anaesthetic used.
- Risks and possible complications – it is important that you understand the risks and complications so that you can weigh up whether a facelift is right for you.
- Medications – tell your surgeon about any medications that you take on a regular basis or have recently taken, including over-the-counter preparations such as fish oils and vitamin supplements.
- Past reactions to medications – tell the surgeon if you have ever had a bad reaction or side effects from any medications, including anaesthetics.
- Preparation for surgery – the surgeon will give you detailed instructions on what you should do at home to prepare for surgery. For example, you may be advised to take a particular drug or alter the dose of an existing medication. Follow all instructions carefully.

**Facelift surgery**

Facelift surgery is usually performed under a general anaesthetic. The length of the operation will depend on the type and extent of the surgery, but could take anywhere
from two to four hours.

The three main types of facelift include:

- Traditional facelift – the surgeon makes an incision (cut) in the hairline from the temple, around and behind the ear, and back into the hairline. The skin is lifted away from the underlying tissues. Muscles are tightened and fat is removed. The surgeon pulls the skin up and back towards the scalp, removes any excess then stitches or staples the skin into its new position.
- Limited incision facelift – the surgeon makes smaller incisions at the temples and around the ears.
- Neck lift – the surgeon makes an incision in front of the ear and back into the hairline. The skin of the jaw and neck is lifted and tightened.

Suture facelift surgery

An alternative form of facelift surgery that is often done using local anaesthetic is a suture facelift (thread lift). The surgeon inserts fine threads through very thin tubes (cannulae) so no cuts are made in the skin.

These threads are made of a non-absorbable medical polypropylene fibre (Prolene®), which has been used safely for many years in surgical operations. Once the threads have been positioned through the tiny puncture sites, the threads are then gently tightened and secured to the facial tissue and skin.

Immediately after a facelift

After the operation, you may expect:

- a drainage tube in the wound to help prevent fluid build-up
- bruising and swelling
- to be given antibiotics to prevent infection
- possible numbness
- pain and discomfort
- dressings or bandages on your face
- a compression garment to help minimise swelling.

Complications of a facelift

All surgery carries some degree of risk. Some of the possible complications of a facelift include:

- allergic reaction to anaesthetic, which may (rarely) be fatal
- bleeding or infection
- blood clots, which may cause potentially fatal cardiovascular complications such as heart attack, deep vein thrombosis or stroke
- collapsed lung
- hair loss along the wound
- tissue death along the wound, or skin loss
- severe or inflamed, itchy scarring
- rough skin
- surfacing of stitches through the skin
- uneven skin contours
- permanent facial pain
- nerve damage, which can cause temporary or permanent paralysis of part or all of the movement of the facial muscles
- numbness of the face, which may be temporary or permanent
- uneven results – for example, eyes are asymmetrical or features don’t line up.

Further surgery may be required to treat complications.

Some of the possible additional complications of a suture facelift include:

- thread movement – this may lead to the thread extruding, breaking or losing its hold on the skin
- pucked skin
- discomfort, if the threads are felt under the skin
- skin irregularities or a loss of facial symmetry
- infection (this is rare).

More extensive surgery may be required if removal is necessary because of infection, discomfort or an unsightly appearance.

This is not a complete list. For example, your medical history or lifestyle may put you at increased risk of certain complications. Speak to your surgeon for more information.

Self-care after a facelift

Be guided by your surgeon, but general self-care suggestions include:

- Follow all instructions on looking after your wounds.
- Don’t bend over for at least three weeks.
- Avoid unnecessary stress on your wounds – for example, don’t wear tops that must be pulled over your head.
- If you have had a suture facelift, take care to avoid excessive facial movements in the first few weeks to make sure the very fine threads stay in their original position. This is necessary until the body develops a tissue reaction around the fibre, which strengthens and holds the facial tissue into its new position.
- Report any bleeding, severe pain or unusual symptoms to your surgeon.
- If necessary, take pain-relieving medication (strictly as directed).
Long-term outlook after a facelift

After a traditional or limited incision facelift and neck lift, the swelling may take months to subside. Scarring will be permanent, but should fade in time. Be patient – improvements to scars may take around a year.

After a suture facelift, some pain may be experienced, but the discomfort usually settles within 24 hours. Some people experience more severe pain after the procedure. There may be slight swelling and bruising for four to 10 days.

Remember, a facelift does not change your fundamental appearance and cannot stop the ageing process. Although the results are permanent, your skin will continue to age. A healthy lifestyle and minimising your daily exposure to sunlight will help maintain the results of your facelift.

Alternatives to facelifts

Alternatives to a facelift can include:

- dermal fillers or injections, such as Botox®, into wrinkles
- injections of botulinum toxin Type A
- laser resurfacing
- facial implants
- accepting yourself – talking to a counsellor or psychologist may help you overcome your concerns and you may decide that you like yourself the way you are.

Where to get help

- Your GP (doctor)
- Plastic surgeon
- Australian Society of Plastic Surgeons Information Hotline Tel. 1300 367 446
- Royal Australasian College of Surgeons Tel. (03) 9249 1200
- Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency Tel. 1300 419 495

References

- Informed consent. Queensland Health.

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Surgery

The following content is displayed as Tabs. Once you have activated a link navigate to the end of the list to view its associated content. The activated link is defined as Active Tab

- **Types of surgery**
- **Exploratory surgery**
- **Blood, tissue and organ donation**
- **Plastic and cosmetic**
- **Reproductive and contraception**
- **A-Z of surgical procedures**

**Types of surgery**

- **Brain surgery**
  Brain surgery is performed for a number of reasons, including alterations in brain tissue, brain blood flow and cerebrospinal fluid...
- **Day surgery and anaesthesia**
  Day surgery is completed in one day, usually the person does not have to stay in hospital overnight...
- **General anaesthetics**
  An anaesthetic is a drug or agent that produces a complete or partial loss of feeling...
- **Surgery**
  Ask your doctor or surgeon about the benefits, risks and possible side effects of surgery...

**Exploratory surgery**

- **Arthroscopy**
  Most people can resume normal activities around three weeks after an arthroscopy...
- **Biopsy**
Before a biopsy, you need to discuss a range of issues with your doctor or surgeon.

- Colonoscopy
  A colonoscopy can be used to look for cancer of the colon (bowel cancer) or colon polyps, which are growths on the lining of the colon.

- Endoscopy
  An endoscope or fibrescope is a long, usually flexible tube with a lens at one end and a video camera at the other.

- Laparoscopy
  The advantage of laparoscopy is that only a small incision is required, which is why it is also known as 'keyhole surgery'.

Blood, tissue and organ donation

- Blood donation
  Donated blood is used to help people who are sick or injured, or for medical research.

- Blood transfusion
  Donated blood is screened for blood-borne diseases such as hepatitis, syphilis and HIV.

- Corneal transplantation and donation
  Corneal transplant surgery would not be possible without generous donors and their families, who have donated corneal tissue so that others may see.

- Kidney donation
  Kidneys are often donated after death but more people are choosing to donate one of their kidneys while still alive (living kidney donation).

- Organ and tissue donation
  Discover the facts about organ and tissue donation, decide about becoming a donor and discuss your decision with the people close to you.

- Organ and tissue transplantation
  Transplantation varies depending on the transplant organ or tissue so speak with your medical team about surgical procedures, recovery and medications.

Plastic and cosmetic

- Abdominoplasty (tummy tuck)
  A 'tummy tuck', or abdominoplasty, is cosmetic surgery to remove fat and excess loose skin from the abdomen.

- Blepharoplasty (eyelid surgery)
  Eyelid surgery, or blepharoplasty, aims to improve the appearance of the upper eyelids, lower eyelids or both.

- Body contouring surgery
  Body contouring surgery is cosmetic surgery to remove sagging skin and extra fat, and improve the shape and tone of underlying tissue.

- Brachioplasty (arm lift surgery)
  An 'arm lift' is surgery to reshape or reconstruct the underside of the upper arm from the armpit to the elbow.

- Breast implants (augmentation)
  Breast implants are inserted under the skin to create larger breasts.

- Breast reduction for men
  Breast reduction surgery for men is surgery to correct overdeveloped or enlarged breasts.

- Breast reduction for women
  Breast reduction surgery removes excess breast fat, glandular tissue and skin to achieve a breast size in proportion with your body.

- Brow lift
  A brow lift is cosmetic surgery to correct a sagging forehead and repair frown lines.

- Cosmetic genital surgery - labiaplasty and phalloplasty
  Cosmetic genital surgery involves reshaping the labia, vulva or penis to alter their size or shape.

- Cosmetic implants - buttock, fat and pectoral
  Buttock and pectoral implants involve surgery to insert shaped silicone pieces into skin cavities.
• Cosmetic surgery
  Cosmetic surgery carries risks and, in some cases, the results are not what you may anticipate.

• Cosmetic treatments - injectables
  Cosmetic injections into the skin can be used to reduce wrinkles.

• Ears - otoplasty
  Ear correction surgery, or otoplasty, is usually done to move prominent ears closer to the head or to reduce the size of large ears.

• Facelift (meloplasty)
  A facelift is a type of cosmetic surgery that removes or tightens facial skin to make a person look younger.

• Facial implants
  Facial implants are used by people who want to restore or improve the normal shape of their face.

• Hair transplant surgery
  Hair transplant surgery involves taking skin from parts of the scalp where hair is growing and grafting it to the thinning or bald areas, or areas of trauma.

• Liposuction
  Liposuction is invasive surgery and is not a substitute for weight reduction or a cure for obesity.

• Medical tourism and insurance
  People may choose to travel overseas to seek medical or surgical treatment that is unavailable in their home country. This is called medical tourism, and it's a booming industry worldwide. People...

• Nose - rhinoplasty
  Rhinoplasty may be performed for cosmetic reasons or to correct a structural problem.

Reproductive and contraception

• Assisted reproductive technology – IVF and ICSI
  IVF (in-vitro-fertilization) and ICSI (intracytoplasmic sperm injection) are assisted reproductive treatment (ART) procedures in which fertilisation of an egg occurs outside the body.

• Caesarean section
  A caesarean section is usually performed when it is safer for the mother or the baby than a vaginal birth.

• Contraception - tubal ligation
  Sterilisation is a permanent method of contraception that a woman can choose if she is sure that she does not want children in the future.

• Contraception - vasectomy
  Having a vasectomy does not affect a man's ability to produce male sex hormones, enjoy sex or reach orgasm.

• Dilatation and curettage (D&C)
  A dilatation and curettage (D&C) is an operation performed on women to lightly scrape away the womb lining.

A-Z of surgical procedures

• Abdominoplasty (tummy tuck)
  A 'tummy tuck', or abdominoplasty, is cosmetic surgery to remove fat and excess loose skin from the abdomen.

• Appendectomy
  An appendectomy is usually carried out on an emergency basis to treat appendicitis.

• Brachioplasty (arm lift surgery)
  An 'arm lift' is surgery to reshape or reconstruct the underside of the upper arm from the armpit to the elbow.

• Brain surgery
  Brain surgery is performed for a number of reasons, including alterations in brain tissue, brain blood flow and cerebrospinal fluid.

• Breast reconstruction and mastectomy
  Some women choose to have breast reconstruction surgery to give a similar appearance to the look of their original breast in normal clothes.
• Cosmetic implants - buttock, fat and pectoral
  Buttock and pectoral implants involve surgery to insert shaped silicone pieces into skin cavities...

• Craniotomy
  A craniotomy is an operation to open the skull (cranium) in order to access the brain for surgical repair...

• Endoscopy
  An endoscope or fibroscope is a long, usually flexible tube with a lens at one end and a video camera at the other...

• Eyes - laser eye surgery
  During laser eye surgery, a computer-controlled laser is used to remove microscopic amounts of tissue from the front surface of the eye...

• Hair transplant surgery
  Hair transplant surgery involves taking skin from parts of the scalp where hair is growing and grafting it to the thinning or bald areas, or areas of trauma...

• Heart bypass surgery
  After heart bypass surgery, eat a wide variety of fresh fruit and vegetables, wholegrain cereals and cold-water fish...

• Heart disease - angioplasty and stent procedures (video)
  People with coronary heart disease talk about the medical procedures that followed their heart attack and diagnosis...

• Kidneys - dialysis and transplant
  People with kidney failure need dialysis or a transplant to stay alive...

• Knee replacement surgery
  Knee replacement surgery removes a diseased knee joint and replaces it with an artificial joint...

• Laminectomy
  A laminectomy is a surgical incision into the vertebra to obtain access to the spinal cord...

• Laparotomy
  A laparotomy is a surgical incision into the abdominal cavity used to examine the abdominal organs and aid diagnosis...

• Myomectomy
  A myomectomy is an operation performed to remove fibroids from the uterus...

• Obesity surgery
  Obesity surgery is not a form of cosmetic surgery, nor an alternative to good eating habits and regular exercise...

• Tracheostomy
  A tracheostomy is a surgical procedure that involves making a cut in the trachea (windpipe) and inserting a tube into the opening...

• Transurethral resection of the prostate (TURP) - for benign prostate disease
  Surgery on the prostate gland can have many side effects, including erectile problems and urinary incontinence...

Related Information

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Related information on other websites

- American Society of Plastic Surgeons
- ASPS Find a Surgeon (in Australia) service
- Australasian Foundation for Plastic Surgery
- Medline Plus – Plastic and cosmetic surgery
- NHS Choices UK – Plastic surgery
- Queensland Health – Informed consent

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