

Lip Lift Surgery

Lip lift surgery is surgery to lift the upper lip to a more pleasing or more youthful position. It can be an anti-ageing or a lip enhancement procedure or both. As we age, the pink part of our lip thins and the length of our upper lip increases. A lip lift counteracts the effect of gravity on the ageing lip position and shortens a long upper lip. Lip lifts also give the impression of a fuller upper lip (pink part) due to the way in which the upper lip is repositioned during the lift surgery. Repositioning the lip has an anti-ageing effect on the mouth area giving a fresher, more rejuvenated appearance to the face. The scar is very discrete due to its careful positioning and heals well.

Indications for lip lift surgery

- Long upper lip (elongated pro-labium)
- Thin upper lip (microchelia)
- Lengthening of the upper lip with ageing (elongated pro-labium)

Limitations of lip lift surgery

- Enough upper lip length needs to be left behind to maintain a natural appearance and to hold a natural position relative to your teeth when the mouth is relaxed
- If a very full appearance to the upper lip is desired, lip fillers or lip augmentation may be needed in addition to a lip lift
- Fine lines and wrinkles may require some additional treatments such as dermal fillers
- Lip lift surgery should not be performed if you have an active cold sore. If you have had cold sores, it is important to inform your surgeon as you may need a course of anti-viral medication to prevent a cold sore during the recovery period.
- Lip lifts lift the central part of your lip (Cupid's bow) more than the outer parts of your lip. This should be taken into consideration when deciding about the surgery. There are outer lip lift techniques, but their scars can be problematic.

- Some shapes of lip and nose do better than others. E.g. if you have a narrow nose relative to your lip, it is harder to achieve a significant lift to your lip while still keeping the scar very discrete.

Dermal fillers

It is possible to have a lip lift while dermal fillers are in place in your lip. However, your surgeon may ask you to postpone your lip lift surgery until they have been absorbed or dissolved in some cases. This is where they will affect the planning and/or performing of a lip lift and have potential to affect your result. Once recovered from your lip lift, you may have dermal fillers to your lip if you wish to do so. It is often not deemed necessary after the lip lift as the lift increased the visibility of your upper lip. Indeed, many people undergo a lip lift as they no longer wish to continue using dermal fillers and wish for a longer lasting effect!

Procedure details

Pre and post-surgery clinical photographs of your lip will be taken. A lip lift is usually performed under local anaesthesia (while you are awake). Careful measurements and markings will be made on your upper lip and then the local anaesthetic will be injected to numb the area. A carefully placed incision around the base of your nostrils will be made and the excess upper lip skin removed in a pattern designed to give a very natural effect. The skin will then be meticulously sutured and tapes placed on the incision. The procedure takes between 45 and 60 minutes.

Post-operative course

It is usual to have some swelling, bruising and discomfort of your upper lip particularly in the first few days following surgery. This will settle over the 1 to 2 weeks following surgery. Sometimes you will have numbness in the upper lip temporarily. Sutures will be removed at 1 week following surgery and the tapes will be removed then too. Sometimes taping for an additional week will be advised.

Recovery

Cool compresses can be placed over the area for comfort and to help reduce swelling and bruising. It is best to avoid bending, stooping and any heavy or strenuous activity

during the healing process. Sleep on 2 to 3 pillows at night to help reduce swelling. Painkillers such as paracetamol can be taken as needed. Most people can return to work and social engagements after 1 to 2 weeks and get back to normal activities after 3 to 4 weeks. The scars usually heal very quickly and gradually fade to very well-hidden fine lines. Your smile will be affected in the early stages of recovery as your upper lip will be swollen.

Other points about lip lift surgery

Relaxation/stretch

Some relaxation of your lip tissues will occur once the swelling has settled and your lip softens. Your lip may appear overlifted in the early stages to allow for this. It may take up to 12 months to see your final results and the scars will continue to soften and fade over 12 to 18 months. You should expect to see some of these changes happening as you recover from your lip lift.

Ageing

You will continue to age at the same rate and in the same way that you always would have. However after lip lift surgery, the earlier effects of ageing are removed and your start point for future ageing is from a more youthful position. As the years go by, you may gradually develop further lengthening of your lip but this will be to a lesser extent than if you did not undergo lip lift surgery.

Extent of lip lift

As well as the proportions between the upper lip and lower lip and the distance between the base of your nose and your upper lip, other anatomical factors determine the amount of lip lift that is possible. In general, lip lifts lift the central part of your lip more than the outer parts. Additional procedures can be done to surgically lift the outer areas, but the scars can be more problematic. The width of the base of your nose and the length of your lip also limit or allow different amounts of lifts. Narrower noses and longer lips allow for less of a lift. If you are in this position, either a more limited lift effect or a second procedure at a later stage may need to be considered.

Complications

Early complications (within the first week of surgery)

Bleeding (haematoma)

It is common to have some mild oozing from the surgical incision for a few days following a lip lift. If there is any suggestion that excessive bleeding after lip lift surgery has occurred, you may need to go back to the operating theatre to have the bleeding stopped and the wound washed out to evacuate the collected blood.

Infection

Rates of severe infection in lip lift surgery are low. Minor wound infections or inflammation may occur - if it does happen, an infection will be treated with antibiotics. Rarely, a return to the operating theatre to wash out the wound might be required.

Blood clots

Blood clots in the veins of the legs (DVT - deep venous thrombosis) are rare after lip lift surgery particularly if done under local anaesthetic. Preventative measures are taken (such as calf compression stockings) if you are having a general anaesthetic. If a DVT does develop, you will need various investigations and treatment as appropriate. The risk can be reduced further by drinking plenty of water postoperatively and gently mobilising. A pulmonary embolus (PE) describes a blood clot that has broken off from the DVT and lodged in the blood vessels in the lungs. This can be serious (at times, fatal), and again, appropriate investigations and treatment are instigated should this be suspected after your operation.

Intermediate complications (within 6 weeks of surgery)

Delayed wound healing

In some people the wounds take longer to heal than in others: this may be due to having had a mild infection of the wound, due to a reaction with the stitches or from “overdoing it” straight after surgery. Normally this is a minor inconvenience, which can be managed with observation or special dressings as an outpatient. Occasionally it can lead to a troublesome infection developing as described above.

Wound dehiscence

Occasionally some of the wound can open or gape. This is normally only a very small area and can be managed by observation and wound care. It usually does not leave any lasting problems. Rarely, the wound may need to be resutured or a scar revision performed at a later date.

Persistent swelling

Some swelling to the upper lip is normal after a lip lift operation and usually peaks day 2 to 3 following surgery. Most of the swelling usually resolves during the first 6 weeks after surgery. In some cases, it can be more severe and persist longer than usual. When swollen, your upper lip is not supple as usual and this can temporarily affect your smile during the first 4 to 6 weeks.

Asymmetries and irregularities

While no-one is perfectly symmetrical, and no two sides of a face are 100% symmetrical, every effort will be made to achieve good symmetry after your surgery. However, there will inevitably be subtle differences between each side. Sometimes these differences can be more noticeable after lip lift surgery. Occasionally there are significant asymmetries and irregularities that need to be addressed with further surgery (a revision operation).

Numbness or hypersensitivity

The skin of your lip may be numb or over sensitive in the aftermath of surgery. The feeling usually normalises eventually but can take several weeks or even months in some cases. Occasionally sensation does not return fully. Nerve damage to the sensory nerves in the area is very rare.

Weakness of lip movement

Rarely there is temporary weakness of movement of the lip. This is usually temporary and resolves over time but occasionally persists longer than expected.

Broken blood vessels

With any skin lifting surgery it is possible to cause some broken capillaries in the skin. This is more so if this condition already exists, and can be noticeable on the lower cheeks and neck area. Skin treatment may be recommended if this is obvious.

Alteration in skin pigmentation/discolouration

Bruising usually appears over the first few days and then resolves over the next 2 to 3 weeks. Sometimes it is more extensive than usual and/or takes longer to resolve than usual. This is more common in patients with very thin or pale skin. In darker skin types, residual brown pigment can be persistent if bruising takes a long time to resolve.

Swelling/lymphatic obstruction following previous dermal filler treatments

While unusual to occur, sometimes unexpected amounts of prolonged swelling can occur in the surrounding tissues after surgery when dermal fillers have been placed in the surgical area or nearby in the past. It may be worse in warm weather. Over time and repeated dermal filler treatments, there is the possibility that the dermal filler may obstruct or hinder the normal lymphatic fluid drainage of the facial tissues.

Late complications (more than 6 weeks from surgery)

Poor scar formation

Scarring will occur whenever the skin is cut and of course, every effort is made to place scar lines where they will heal well and be least visible. Although scarring on average is minimal, scar maturation varies from person to person and occurs over 6 to 12 months, with scars passing through a red, itchy and lumpy phase, prior to settling down to thinner, softer less distinct lines. Normally the scars from lip lift surgery heal well and are barely perceptible but occasionally, they may tend to thicken and may require steroid injections to help them settle down. In some cases, minor surgical scar revision surgery may be needed. Hypertrophic or keloid scars can occasionally occur – these are thickened and lumpy scars that are more common in people of Asian or Afro-Caribbean descent. Occasionally the scars are pulled down during healing and/or are more visible than anticipated.

Under lifting

Some people may feel not enough of a lift has been performed. Occasionally this is the case and revision surgery is required. However, your surgeon will carefully measure out your lip beforehand so that they maintain the correct proportions between your upper and lower lip and the correct distances between your nose and upper lip so that this is not a common occurrence.

Over lifting

Rarely too much of a lift is performed leaving too short an upper lip and too much dental show (too much of your teeth visible). Further surgery may be needed to correct this. This can be a difficult problem to correct.

Loss of shape between nostril edge and upper lip

Loss of the natural curve between the edge of the nostril and where it meets the upper lip. While this is rare, it is difficult to correct if it happens and can result in a less natural appearance.

Chronic pain

Occasionally patients suffer from chronic pain after surgery. This is not always predictable or easily treated. It is more likely to occur if you suffer from severe or complex pain prior to your surgery. Further surgery or referral to a pain specialist may be indicated in this situation although it must be appreciated that there is not always a surgical solution to chronic pain.

Loss of lift effect

As your recovery takes place, your lip tissues gradually soften. This is a normal part of recovery. In some situations, a degree of recurrence of a long lip length or a lax upper lip may occur. This is more likely in very heavy, sebaceous skin or very thin or very stretched skin with poor tone or when surgery has taken place after significant weight loss. The physiological properties of your skin such as thickness, strength, elasticity, texture and tone are not altered by lip lift surgery. These are determined by your genetics and skin type, your age and health and your lifestyle e.g. sun exposure, weight, smoking, medications. Further surgery is usually needed to address this.

The sub-optimal result

Despite performing the operation as accurately and carefully as possible, some people will feel that their result is not exactly as they were hoping it would be. This may be due to one of the problems described above occurring or due to unrealistic expectations of the surgery e.g. mild asymmetries, visible scarring or less than expected effect. An understanding of what is realistically achievable in your particular case is essential prior to undergoing surgery. Should you be left with a sub-optimal result, this will be discussed with you along with the subsequent appropriate treatment options. Treatment may



include revision surgery. Extra charges may be applicable for further surgery in some circumstances and this will be discussed with you.

Longevity of procedure

Lip lift surgery has a high success rate and is considered an excellent procedure for lip augmentation or for rejuvenating the mouth area. You will continue to age at the same rate and in the same way that you always would have. However after lip lift surgery, the earlier effects of ageing are removed and your start point for future ageing is from a more youthful position. As the years go by, you may gradually develop further lengthening but this will be to a lesser extent than if you did not undergo lip lift surgery.