

FACELIFT - AN UPLIFTING EXPERIENCE!

Jeffrey Marcus, M.D., FACS

Did you ever wonder why the skin on people's faces sags and wrinkles as they get older? Fibers in the skin lose their strength, and the skin becomes less elastic. The skin stretches and it loses the ability to spring back into a tight condition. The result is an appearance of excess, droopy, and wrinkled skin. The medical term for the condition is cutis laxa, or "lax skin."

What causes sagging skin?

Age is the main factor in skin losing its elasticity. Heredity is important also. Exposure to sunlight accelerates the degeneration of the elastic fibers. Tobacco may aggravate the condition, as well. Doctors can actually see this change when examining the skin under the microscope. The medical name for this is solar elastosis. Thus sunlight is not only responsible for causing skin cancers, it is also the enemy of beauty. There isn't much you can do to select your ancestors, and you certainly don't want to stop getting older (the alternative isn't a good one!), but limiting sun exposure is one thing you can do to slow down the aging of your skin. Sunscreen will help protect it from ultraviolet radiation from the sun. Creams and lotions will make it softer, but not prevent loss of elasticity.

What does a facelift accomplish?

The facelift operation does two things. It first tightens the soft tissue of the face and neck under the skin. Then it removes the excess skin. The muscles and other soft tissue of the cheeks and neck are actually "suspended" by sutures that pull them upward. The sutures are placed below the skin in the soft tissues. You can get the idea of what happens by putting your fingers on your face in front of and just below your ears and pulling upward and backward. After these sutures pull up the soft tissues, the "excess" skin is removed, and the skin is sutured.

Why don't you see scars?

Incisions are made in areas that are camouflaged. They begin in the temple, where the scar ends up being covered by hair. They continue down in front of the ear, where the scar is "buried" in a skin crease. Then they end up behind the ear and again in the hairline of the neck.

How much discomfort is there?

Very little. The operation, itself, is done either under general anesthesia (asleep) or local anesthesia (numbing medication with medication to relax). Afterward there is surprisingly little discomfort. A large bulky dressing may be worn for a few days, but most patients report very little discomfort.

How long does a facelift last?

This is a great question, but there is no great answer. It depends upon a number of factors. A facelift turns back the clock so that a person looks younger, but it does not stop the aging process. The person starts ageing again when the operation is completed, but the person will always look younger than if they didn't have the operation. How fast they age depends upon the same factors of heredity and sun exposure. Some people are happy with a facelift once in a lifetime. Others may want a minor "tuck-up" in a year, and others may want to repeat the procedure in five or ten years, depending upon how determined they are to look their best. One fortunate thing is that the ageing process seems slower after a facelift because a bed of scar tissue is laid down with the surgery, slowing down the tendency of the skin to stretch.