

Fat Grafting Vs Dermal Fillers: What's Best for :You?

Are you starting to look a bit gaunt in the face?

There was a time when a woman of a certain age had to choose between her face and her bottom. Unfortunately, as we age, we lose volume in the face and start to look a bit gaunt and tired. Hollows in the temples, cheeks and under the eyes cast unflattering shadows which emphasise any wrinkles. The only solution was to put on a few pounds.

But by the late 1980s cosmetic surgeons had come up with a multi-tasking solution – fat grafting. Fat sucked out during liposuction was injected into the face - weight loss and anti-ageing all at the same time! Then along came synthetic fillers - a quick, non-surgical alternative for the time-poor generation. But how do you choose the right option for you?

Which lasts longer?

Fat grafting has one major advantage: it can be permanent. Synthetic fillers, however, are only temporary. They are broken down and reabsorbed by the body anytime between several months and a couple of years.

Which is safer?

Clients often feel safer using their own tissue because there is no chance of an allergic reaction. However, although fillers are created synthetically in a laboratory, the risk of an allergic reaction is low.

Which looks more natural?

Fat is injected using a multi-layered technique to help it blend seamlessly with existing fat. It also contains stem cells that produce growth factors to rejuvenate the skin. Occasional lumps may get smaller with time or, if not, can be removed or injected with a steroid. Synthetic fillers can also cause lumps if they are injected too shallowly.

Which has more downtime?

No contest here. Although fat grafting is considered a relatively minor two hour procedure, there is still considerably more downtime than with fillers because it involves two procedures:

a) Liposuction

Fat is broken up then sucked out under local anaesthetic via liposuction from fatter areas such as buttocks and hips. Fortunately only a small incision is needed. The fat then has to be separated from blood and other fluids.

c) Fat injections.

Small amounts of the fat are injected into sunken facial areas.

By contrast fillers are quick and non-invasive. No incisions and no anaesthesia. They can be performed quickly in a doctor's office and the results are immediate and also reversible.

Which hurts more?

Again no contest. Fat grafting involves a two week recovery. You shouldn't feel any pain during the procedure, but you may be given painkillers for any discomfort afterwards. You might not need to stay overnight, but someone will need to drive you home. Fat grafting is generally considered a safe procedure, but surgery always carries a small risk:

b) Temporary numbness

d) Risk of infection either at donor site or injection site.

e) Skin necrosis/tissue death

f) Haematoma: collection of blood under the skin

Expect significant bruising and swelling for two weeks afterwards. The small scar at the donor site will fade, but will never disappear completely.

By contrast, fillers are injected through such a fine needle that any swelling or bruising is minimal. The filler is premixed with anaesthetic, so only a topical anaesthetic is needed.

Which is more expensive?

Fat grafting is more expensive initially because it includes liposuction, but if the fat takes then the results are permanent. However, fillers are temporary and will need to be repeated, so will be more expensive in the long run.

Which gives the most predictable results?

Fat injections can be unpredictable because it is impossible to tell how many fat cells will take permanently and how many will die and be reabsorbed by the body. The grafted fat has to develop a blood supply in order to survive. An experienced surgeon will make allowances for this and overcorrect. Fat cells are more likely to survive in the face, but unfortunately less so in more mature clients.

Which is quicker?

Again, no contest. Fat grafting may involve multiple treatments, whereas fillers are often a one-off treatment. Even after the swelling and bruising have subsided, expect to wait six months to discover how many fat cells have survived.

Which filler is the best for which part of the face?

Fat grafting lasts longer than fillers in static lines like the cheeks and mid-face rather than in more mobile areas such as around the mouth and the naso-labial folds. Fat isn't as good at filling finer lines near the surface because it is injected more deeply than fillers, right into the fat layer. Fat is therefore less suitable under the eyes because lumps and bumps show through such fine skin.

Conclusion

For the time-poor generation, the immediacy and predictability of fillers must seem far more convenient. For first-timers, they are certainly more low-maintenance. They are also good if someone is lucky enough not to have any spare fat! Perhaps fat grafting should reinvent itself as the right filler for a mature woman in combination with a facelift and liposuction. It can also be bought up to date by combining with PRP which can help more fat cells to survive. No one will ever have to choose between her face and her bottom again!

