

Fat Transfer

General procedure information

As we age our faces lose volume and elasticity because of the gravity, UV light exposure, smoking, and lifestyle, resulting in sunken cheeks, and sharper chins. The fat transfer procedure can smooth out face contours or add shape to different parts of your face by using tissue taken from other parts of your body.

You may choose to have fat implants or transfer because you think that your face is wrinkled or lacks shape, but this may be caused by your face structure and cannot necessarily be corrected by a fat transfer. Therefore, it is important to talk to your doctor about whether fat transfer is the right procedure for you, or if there are any alternatives.

Fat transfer has been considered for years a procedure that restores volume to your face, but surgeons have encountered over the years the same problem: variability of the results. The latest developments in this area of cosmetic surgery have led to the use of a more successful technique that can provide a gradual, controlled restoration of the youthful shapes of the face and other parts of the body.

This new technique makes the results much more predictable, as the grafting process is more complex with fat cells that have survived the grafting process having a lasting presence. A plus for the fat transfer procedure is that the material used comes from your own body, making it well tolerated in the long-term.

Your consultation

During your consultation your surgeon will take a general medical history and ask about any medications you are taking. He will also explain how fat transfer works, ask about your goals for the procedure and discuss what you should expect.

He will also make you aware of the risks associated with this procedure such as bruising, swelling, lumpiness, skin discoloration and infection.

Preparing for surgery

After a thorough evaluation and a full medical history, your surgeon will discuss with you various ways of correcting the problem.

Before your surgery:

- You should not take aspirin or anti-inflammatory medicines such as ibuprofen for 3 weeks before surgery.
- Avoid alcoholic beverages for 24 hours prior to surgery.
- Stop or reduce smoking for at least 2 weeks prior and after surgery.

- Wear loose and comfortable clothing on the day of surgery.
- Do not wear any jewellery, contact lenses, makeup or nail polish.

Your operation

Using a thin needle called a cannula, your surgeon will extract fat cells from a fat-rich area of your body like the abdomen or hips. This process is very much like liposuction.

The fat cells are then processed to separate intact cells from those that have been damaged and then injected into the new area using a fine cannula and a series of tiny needles for every millilitre of graft.

The careful placement of the fat cells into tiny pockets of surrounding tissue with good blood supply creates the proper setting for the graft to "take". Sometimes extracted fat is stored for future treatments.

Surgery normally takes up to two hours, depending on the area of the body and quantity of fat involved. Fat transfer can be done under either general or local anaesthetic depending on the extent of the area to be treated.

Recovery

There will be some swelling and bruising to the area which will subside after about 10 days. The treatment should result in skin being smoother or parts of the face having a fuller shape. Nobody can guarantee that the results are permanent, because the body can sometimes reabsorb the injected fat. In this case, repeated injections may be required.

However, if performed properly, there is a substantial percentage of fat cells that survive and give a permanent result. Unfortunately it is not possible to predict this percentage.

After your procedure you will be given an antibiotic and possibly some antiviral medication as well (for patients suffering with herpes and that had lip treatment). It is important that you finish all the medication you are given.

- If you experience discomfort, your surgeon will prescribe pain medication or he will advise you to take Paracetamol.
- Avoid aspirin and anti-inflammatory tablets as they can promote bleeding.
- Avoid hot drinks and food that needs chewing for at least six hours if your procedure was performed under local anaesthetic.
- Don't worry if you feel swollen and bruised for a week or so after your procedure, longer if you had a large area treated. Apply cold compresses to relieve this symptom.
- Products that contain arnica, heparinoid, vitamin K can assist to get rid of the bruises fast.



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Risks and complications

Fat transfer risks are few, rare, and minimal; soreness and swelling are possible. Your face or lips may simply reabsorb all or most of the fat injection. Rare but possible fat transfer risks and complications include an allergic reaction to the local anaesthetics, a blood clot at the treatment or donor site.

Being disappointed with the results of a fat transfer surgery could also be considered a "risk." The placement of the fat transfer may not be satisfactory; the duration of the result may not be as long as you'd like; or your face may not "take" the fat transfer. Your face or lips may not look exactly as you'd expect.