

## CM01 Facelift

### What is a facelift?

A facelift is an operation to tighten and lift the soft tissues of your face and neck.

Your surgeon will assess you and let you know if a facelift is suitable for you. However, it is your decision to go ahead with the operation or not. This document will give you information about the benefits and risks to help you make an informed decision.

If you have any questions that this document does not answer, you should ask your surgeon or any member of the healthcare team.

### Is a facelift suitable for me?

As you get older, gravity pulls down on the skin and soft tissues of your face, causing them to sag. The fat that was supported by these tissues drops down, making you look older. A facelift will reduce the signs of ageing in your face and neck (see figure 1). You are most likely to benefit from a facelift if you have one or more of the following signs of ageing.

- You have deeper folds in the skin on the sides of your nose and mouth.
- Your cheeks have begun to sag.
- You have developed a double chin or folds in the skin of your neck.

If you have signs of ageing in other parts of your face, your surgeon may suggest that you consider treating these first or at the same time as a facelift. Treating droopy eyelids or eyebrows can often be the most effective treatment to make you look younger.

Your surgeon will carry out a detailed assessment before deciding if surgery is suitable for you. This may include taking photos for your medical records and asking you questions about your medical history. Your surgeon will examine your face. For the operation to be successful, you need to have a good bone structure and your skin should still be elastic (stretchable).

They will also ask you if you are planning to lose a lot of weight. It may be better to lose the weight before having surgery.

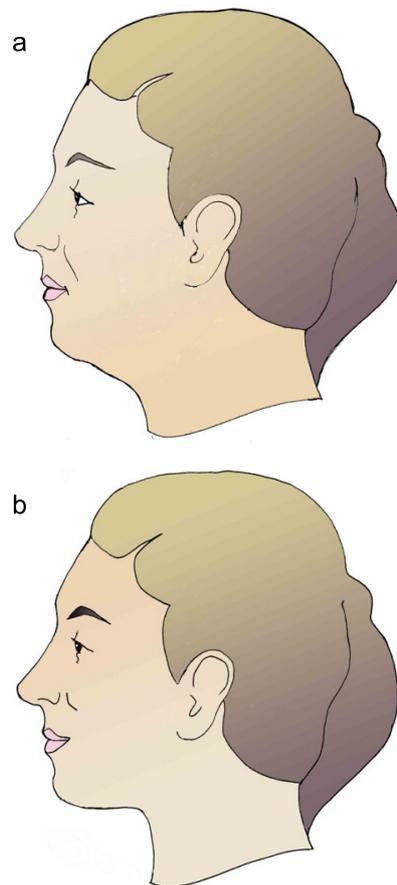


Figure 1

a Sagging soft tissues

b Reduced signs of ageing

## What are the benefits of surgery?

If the operation is successful, your face should look younger. Most people who have a successful facelift have a significant boost in self-confidence and are more comfortable with their appearance.

## Are there any alternatives to a facelift?

A facelift is the most effective way to reduce sagging in your face and neck.

A facelift will not help to reduce fine wrinkling around your mouth, eyes and forehead as this is due to the action of muscles. Your surgeon may be able to assess you for resurfacing or injecting botulinum toxin (Botox) to smooth out fine wrinkles. Deeper wrinkles can sometimes be filled out using implants.

Droopy eyelids or eyebrows can be treated using other surgical techniques and you may want to consider these first or at the same time as a facelift.

## What will happen if I decide not to have the operation?

Your surgeon may be able to recommend an alternative to reduce the signs of ageing in your face. A facelift will not improve your physical health. However, if your self-esteem is low this may improve after surgery.

## What does the operation involve?

The operation is performed under a general anaesthetic and usually takes about two to three hours.

The most common type of facelift is called the SMAS facelift. The aim is to raise and tighten the loose skin and tissue in the neck, chin, jaw-line and lower cheeks. The SMAS facelift also tightens the deeper layer of tough tissue under the skin.

Younger people may benefit from a mid-facelift (also called a subperiosteal facelift). This type of facelift aims to lift the cheeks and upper half of your face.

## • SMAS facelift

Your surgeon will need to make a cut on both sides of your face. Each cut starts in the hairline above and to the front of your ear, along the natural creases of your skin in front of your ear, around your ear lobe and along the hairline behind your ear. They will then separate the skin from the SMAS layer in the area of your cheeks and neck. Your surgeon will then cut under the SMAS layer, lifting it upwards and tightening it. Tightening the SMAS layer can give a better facelift that lasts longer. Your surgeon will then tighten the skin upwards towards your ears and remove any excess skin (see figure 2). Sometimes your surgeon may make a small cut under your chin to remove any excess fat and tighten the muscles.

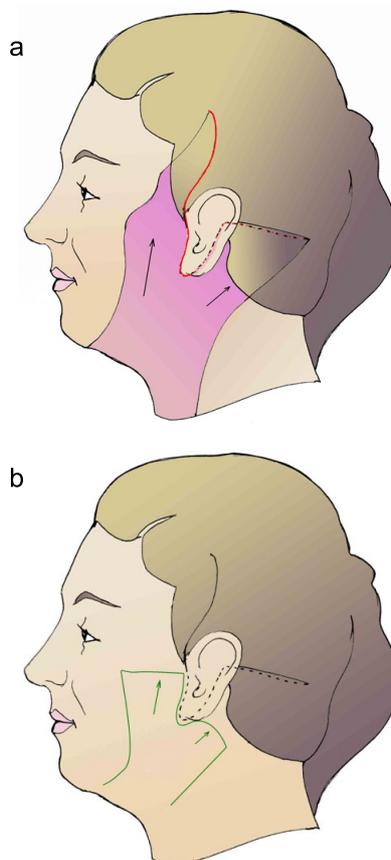


Figure 2

- a The SMAS layer lifted and tightened
- b The skin tightened and excess skin removed

### • MACS facelift

This is a variation of the SMAS facelift, where your surgeon tightens the SMAS layer with special suspension stitches to avoid cutting underneath it (see figure 3). This involves less surgery but the results may not last as long.

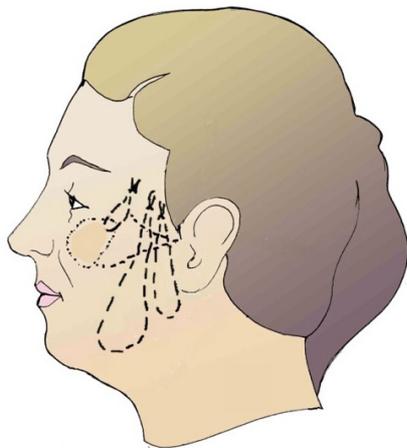


Figure 3

The SMAS layer tightened using suspension stitches

### • Mid-facelift

Your surgeon will make small cuts along your hairline and either inside your mouth or in your lower eyelid. They may insert an endoscope (small telescope) to examine the facial structures over your cheekbones. Your surgeon will use the endoscope, special surgical instruments and stitches to lift the cheeks. Your surgeon may place drains (small tubes) in the cuts to help drain blood or fluid. They will usually close the cuts with stitches or staples, leaving the drains in place.

At the end of the operation, your surgeon may loosely strap your face with bandages to give support.

### What should I do about my medication?

You should continue your normal medication unless you are told otherwise. Let your surgeon know if you are on **warfarin, clopidogrel, aspirin** or other **anti-inflammatory drugs**, as these are more likely to cause you to bleed after your operation. Follow your surgeon's advice about stopping this medication before the operation.

### What can I do to help make the operation a success?

#### • Lifestyle changes

If you smoke, try to stop smoking now. Stopping smoking several weeks or more before an operation may reduce your chances of getting complications and will improve your long-term health.

For help and advice on stopping smoking, go to [www.gosmokefree.co.uk](http://www.gosmokefree.co.uk).

You have a higher chance of developing complications if you are overweight.

For advice on maintaining a healthy weight, go to [www.eatwell.gov.uk](http://www.eatwell.gov.uk).

#### • Exercise

Regular exercise can reduce the risk of heart disease and other medical conditions, improve how your lungs work, boost your immune system, help you to control your weight and improve your mood. Exercise should help to prepare you for the operation, help with your recovery and improve your long-term health.

For information on how exercise can help you, go to [www.eidoactive.co.uk](http://www.eidoactive.co.uk).

Before you start exercising, you should ask a member of the healthcare team or your GP for advice.

### What complications can happen?

The healthcare team will try to make your operation as safe as possible. However, complications can happen. Some of these can be serious and can even cause death. You should ask your doctor if there is anything you do not understand. Any numbers which relate to risk are from studies of people who have had this operation. Your doctor may be able to tell you if the risk of a complication is higher or lower for you.

The complications fall into three categories.

- 1 Complications of anaesthesia
- 2 General complications of any operation
- 3 Specific complications of this operation

## 1 Complications of anaesthesia

Your anaesthetist will be able to discuss with you the possible complications of having an anaesthetic.

## 2 General complications of any operation

- **Pain**, which is usually easily controlled with painkillers. It is common for your face to feel numb because of temporary damage to superficial nerves. This helps to reduce any pain.
- **Bleeding** during or soon after surgery. This rarely needs a blood transfusion but you may need another operation to stop the bleeding. It is common to get bruising in your cheeks and neck, which usually fades over the next couple of weeks. If you have a mid-facelift, you may get more serious swelling that can take months to settle. Small collections of blood can develop and cause areas of unevenness in your face. This can take up to six weeks to settle. If a small collection of blood is noticed early enough, your surgeon may be able to remove the blood through one of the cuts.
- **Minor infection** on the surface of the wounds. This is rare and easily treated with antibiotics.
- **Unightly scarring** of the skin. Usually the scars will settle over time. However, the scars can sometimes stay thick and red. Most of the line of the cuts are usually hidden in the hairline. Follow the instructions your surgeon gives you about how to care for your wounds.
- **Blood clots** in the legs (deep-vein thrombosis), which can occasionally move through the bloodstream to the lungs (pulmonary embolus), making it difficult for you to breathe. Nurses will encourage you to get out of bed soon after surgery and may give you injections and special stockings to wear to reduce the risk of blood clots.

## 3 Specific complications of this operation

- **Loss of skin** near the scars. The risk is higher in people who smoke, in older people and if you have a SMAS facelift. Separating a lot of skin from the tissue underneath and pulling it tight can damage the blood supply, causing an open wound. The wounds are usually hidden in the hairline and should heal in four to five weeks.
- **Developing a collection of blood** under the skin (haematoma) (risk in men: 7 to 9 in 100, risk in women: less than 3 in 100). If this happens, you may need to have another operation to remove the blood. The risk is higher in men because they tend to have a greater blood supply to the face.
- **Developing pale areas on your face.** You will usually have some redness where the skin was separated from the tissue underneath. Over time, the affected areas can become pale. If this happens, you should be able to cover it with make-up.
- **Darkening in the colour of your face** where the skin over your cheeks was separated from the tissue underneath. This usually settles over a few months. However, if you have dark skin you may need to use special make-up to cover it. Some people get a lot of small broken veins in the cheek area which causes red thread-like marks.
- **Hair loss** (risk: less than 2 in 100). The risk is higher if you have light-coloured hair and if you have a SMAS facelift. Pulling the skin tight can place tension on the scar which can stretch over time, creating a bald strip. However, this is usually only obvious when your hair is wet or blows in the wind.

- **Damage to the facial nerve.** Branches of the facial nerve pass under the SMAS layer and control the normal appearance and expressions of your face. Any damage to the nerve can cause permanent loss of control of parts of your face and an unnatural appearance (risk: less than 5 in 200). The risk is lower if you have a MACS facelift because your surgeon will not need to cut under the SMAS layer. However, sometimes a branch of the nerve may get caught in an interweaving stitch, which may lead to temporary loss of control of part of your face. This usually settles after a few weeks.

- **Cosmetic problems.** Minor areas of unevenness are common, particularly with the MACS facelift, and usually settle over time. It is difficult to predict exactly how the wounds near your ears will heal. Despite your surgeon carefully planning where they need to make the cuts, your ear lobes may get pulled slightly up or down as the wounds heal. It is possible to have these minor problems corrected by a small procedure under local anaesthetic.

### How soon will I recover?

- **In hospital**

After the operation you will be transferred to the recovery area and then to the ward. Your face will look bruised and feel very swollen. It may take up to two weeks for this swelling to settle.

You should be able to go home the same day or the day after. However, your doctor may recommend that you stay a little longer. If you do go home the same day, **a responsible adult should take you home in a car or taxi, and stay with you for at least 24 hours.**

If you are worried about anything, in hospital or at home, ask a member of the healthcare team. They should be able to reassure you or identify and treat any complications.

- **Returning to normal activities**

Most people return to normal activities within two to three weeks. The bandages can be removed within the first week and your surgeon will then usually remove the stitches or staples.

You should be able to return to work after the second week, depending on your type of job.

For the first three weeks after the operation, do not lift anything heavy or do strenuous housework, like vacuuming or ironing. You should be able to do a limited amount of activity, such as lifting young children, after about two weeks.

You should avoid sex for the first two weeks. You should also avoid bending down and try to sleep with extra pillows to keep your head raised up. You should then be very gentle with your face for at least another month. You should also avoid drinking any alcohol for at least a few weeks and keep your face out of the sun.

Regular exercise should help you to return to normal activities as soon as possible. Before you start exercising, you should ask a member of the healthcare team or your GP for advice.

Do not drive until you are confident about controlling your vehicle and always check with your doctor and insurance company first.

- **The future**

Your surgeon will arrange for you to have follow-up visits to check on your progress. It usually takes a few weeks for your face to look and feel more natural. The results of a facelift last for a long time. Your face will still continue to age but your face should always appear younger than if you had not had surgery.

## Summary

A facelift is a cosmetic operation to make your face appear younger. It is only suitable for certain people. You should consider the options carefully and have realistic expectations about the results.

Surgery is usually safe and effective. However, complications can happen. You need to know about them to help you make an informed decision about surgery. Knowing about them will also help to detect and treat any problems early.

## Further information

- NHS smoking helpline on 0800 169 0 169 and at [www.gosmokefree.co.uk](http://www.gosmokefree.co.uk)
- [www.eatwell.gov.uk](http://www.eatwell.gov.uk) – for advice on maintaining a healthy weight
- [www.eidoactive.co.uk](http://www.eidoactive.co.uk) – for information on how exercise can help you
- [www.aboutmyhealth.org](http://www.aboutmyhealth.org) - for support and information you can trust
- "Considering cosmetic surgery" booklet available from the Department of Health at [www.dh.gov.uk](http://www.dh.gov.uk)
- NHS Direct on 0845 46 47 (0845 606 46 47 - textphone)
- [www.eidohealthcare.com](http://www.eidohealthcare.com)

## Acknowledgements

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## Local information

You can get information locally from your BMI Hospital.

**Tell us how useful you found this document at [www.patientfeedback.org](http://www.patientfeedback.org)**

**This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant health professional would give you.**

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