



mature facelifts

With people living much longer these days it is worthwhile for those aged even in their 60s, 70s and 80s to consider a facelift says Sydney plastic surgeon **Dr Warwick Nettle**. Lise Petersen reports.

An older patient can be considered to be aged anything over 60 these days,' says Sydney plastic surgeon Dr Warwick Nettle. 'This is because today people aged in their 30s and 40s are having more procedures done more frequently. In fact, facelifting surgery is now most common in patients in their late 30s through to their early 50s. The justification for this is that skin ageing starts at about 16 and so by the time most people turn 40 they have experienced over 20 years of skin ageing, and then by their 60s, more than 40 years of it.'

He explains that there is basically a chronological age, a physiological age and a mental age that people are: 'Obviously chronological age is, say, 60 plus, but a person's physiological and mental age may well be much younger. For example there are people who are aged 60 plus who are 'good' physiologically and who mentally feel only 30 or 40. They are in excellent health and feel fantastic but their chronological age is creeping up on them. Mental age is really what most facelifting surgery is all about.'

Health issues

There are a number of issues to watch out for in the older facelift patient. 'Firstly, many older people may have health conditions such as a cardiac history, thyroid issues, diabetes and very commonly hypertension,' Dr Nettle says. 'In other words there can be more medical issues in the over-60 age group. But none of these should cause any insurmountable problems, especially if the surgeon has a really good operating team including a good anaesthetist, and if any medical conditions have been checked out beforehand. This way even people who have previously had any relatively serious illnesses should be able to undergo the procedure. The check needs to include tests such as an ECG, a blood count and electrolytes. So if a

patient has, for example, a cardiac condition as long as their cardiologist approves the procedure we will perform it.'

Technical issues

'Clearly the major issue from the surgeon's point of view is that a moderate number of people in the older age group have atrophy of the subcutaneous layer, an obvious lack of elasticity of the skin and a lot of the dynamic lines (such as the crow's feet, frown lines and lines around the mouth) which have become quite ingrained,' says Dr Nettle.

'What this basically means is that with the surgery one tries not to be too severe and extreme. The surgeon also has to be extremely careful about the direction in which the skin and the SMAS are moved. The SMAS is the connective tissue layer immediately deep to the subcutaneous fat to the skin. Normally when it is pulled, the skin has a nice fat layer which disguises the SMAS layer from being seen from the outside. But if there is atrophy of the subcutaneous fat layer, then clearly it is more easily seen and this can lead to strange lines, hollows and dynamic contour irregularities.

The SMAS has to be in a congruent direction with a congruent pull. In the older patient, the surgeon has to be careful about how the layers beneath the skin and the skin are pulled so odd-looking stretched lines and pulls don't eventuate. It is necessary to be less extreme and gentler than with younger patients for an effective result – surgeons can get away with a lot more with younger patients.'

Preventative measures

Dr Nettle says it is important to note that the current vogue is for facelifting at an early age but many people can actually put it off for years through preventative measures: 'Preventative measures include good nutrition and

maintaining a steady weight (not allowing the weight to go up and down). Good dentition is also extremely important as a preventative to facial ageing. People should try to avoid periodontal disease through regular flossing and dental check-ups – the teeth are a good indication of your general physiological health and a good blood supply. Excessive sun exposure, smoking, lack of exercise and also too much exercise should also be avoided. Botox is an effective preventative as is Collagen, the occasional skin peel and microdermabrasion. Good general skin health is worth pursuing to avoid facelifting until older.'

The oldest person Dr Nettle has performed a facelift on was aged 84 and he says it went extremely well. 'In this day and age 60-year-olds may well be living another 30 years so it is never too late to choose to have the procedure,' he adds. 'We don't frown on people who are 60 wanting a facelift – we just make sure they are healthy and are aware of the technical issues to make sure it all works well.' **acsm**

A patient's personal experience

Before seeing Dr Nettle for a necklift and mid-face lift two years ago the only cosmetic surgery Anne*, now 65, had tried was an acid peel. Her physician recommended her to Dr Nettle and she had the surgery performed because her face had started to bag a little. 'I wanted it done because I work in the public eye,' she says. 'After the operation I did everything Dr Nettle said to do and experienced no problems whatsoever. The end result was very good – you can't even see any scarring behind my ears.'

Today Anne feels more confident. 'I never did look my age but having the surgery has given me more of an interest in myself and I feel better,' she explains. 'The surgery looks so natural nobody notices I've had anything major done. They just say: 'Gee, your skin looks good' or 'Gosh, you're good for your age'. My attitude is that you've only got one life, so go for it. I'm healthy. I'm still working. I could live another 30 years, so why not?'

* Not her real name



BEFORE



AFTER facelift by Dr Nettle



BEFORE



AFTER facelift by Dr Nettle



BEFORE



AFTER facelift by Dr Nettle