

rejuvenating ageing eyes

Sydney plastic surgeon **Dr Warwick Nettle** spoke with Lise Taylor about the latest developments in eyelid surgery and ways to improve the appearance of the eyes.

As we age one of the first things we notice changing is the appearance of our eyes. It might begin with laughter lines and creases at the corners, and then more wrinkles accumulate over time. Later, drooping eyelids, bags and an overall tired or sad look to the eye region can develop.

Blepharoplasty, also known as eyelid surgery, counters these signs of ageing. The procedure is designed to reduce the amount of fat and excess skin responsible for the hooding of the upper eyelids, as well as reduce puffiness and bags under the eyes.

Sydney plastic surgeon Dr Warwick Nettle says eyelid surgery is often one of the first cosmetic procedures a patient contemplates, and that it is a good option to begin facial rejuvenation with because it has the capacity to brighten the appearance of the entire face. 'Eyelid surgery is a surgical cosmetic enhancement of the upper and lower

'Blepharoplasty is generally carried out as an isolated procedure, but it can also be performed as part of an overall facial rejuvenation'

lids to rejuvenate the eyes. People generally have concerns about sagging skin, wrinkles and bags, and an eyelid surgery procedure seeks to address these issues,' he says.

One way to see the toll that time takes on your face is by comparing the eye area of children to that of adults. Dr Nettle explains, 'Children usually have fairly full and soft

eyelids, in which the bones around the eye are camouflaged by the eyelid skin and fat. But as time goes by the skin tends to sag and the fat starts to protrude into bags underneath the eye. Eyelid surgery works to camouflage this appearance,' he says.

Eyelid surgery can be performed on the upper eyelids, the lower eyelids or on both. Because the eyelids tend to show the first signs of facial ageing, blepharoplasty is generally carried out as an isolated procedure, but it can also be performed as part of an overall facial rejuvenation.

According to Dr Nettle, surgeons have considerably improved the techniques used in eyelid procedures over the years. 'For upper lid surgery, the emphasis used to be on removing a large amount of skin and taking out as much fat as possible. Over the long term this frequently led, in part, to dry eyes and a hollow, sunken look, which does not create a rejuvenated effect,' he explains. 'Now we have improved the technique and concentrate on simply trying to reproduce the smooth, flowing, soft contours of youth as much as possible. The trend today is towards being more conservative.'

In addition, the surgery is now performed with a scalpel rather than with a laser. 'Ninety-nine percent of people go "under the knife" these days instead. This is because the laser is more technically difficult to use, in part because it is not a tactile experience. It also tends to result in whiter scarring because of the cutting and burning on either side of the incision site. In addition, the stitches need to be left in for a longer period of time than with a scalpel, which may result in permanent stitch marks as well,' says Dr Nettle.

When performing upper eyelid surgery, an incision is made in the upper crease fold. This incision is often difficult

for people to see afterwards. In most cases, a segment of skin is removed and then the underlying muscle is trimmed so it sits crisply against the upper eyelid line.

Dr Nettle says as people age their upper lids tend to hollow out laterally but bulge centrally. This is why the next step is to remove a little of the central fat bag, while preserving the lateral fat. Finally, nylon stitches are placed underneath the skin. These are removed postoperatively on day four or five.

In relation to the lower eyelids, the issues people most commonly want to address are excess skin and fatty bags. Dr Nettle says procedures performed on this area have affected more of a change in terms of facial rejuvenation than just about any other procedure.

'Surgeons used to perform what was called a reduction blepharoplasty, which involved removing a lot of skin and fat. However, removing so much skin left people with hollow-looking lower lids, giving them a "hound-dog" appearance. Today surgery tends to be more conservative, and the fat is either preserved, redistributed or removed, depending on what the concerns are. Factors include where the fat bag is located and whether or not the patient has a tear trough. There are many different parameters involved in how to properly distribute the volume.

'Basically the aim of lower eyelid surgery is to achieve a flowing lower lid and cheek junction. In the procedure we take the muscle that is underlying the skin and pull it up into position. After this we trim the skin in a conservative fashion. If you just take out the skin without ensuring the muscle doesn't sag, a drooping of the lower lids can develop. This is why it is important to ensure the muscle is tightened conservatively as well.'

Laser resurfacing can also be performed on the lower eyelids to address fat bags and to tighten the skin but Dr Nettle says this is no longer common practise. He explains, 'Surgeons have realised that laser resurfacing can actually cause a lot of problems, including depigmentation and thinning of the skin, which actually causes more wrinkles. Simply tightening the muscle and then conservatively trimming the skin often gives a much more natural look.'

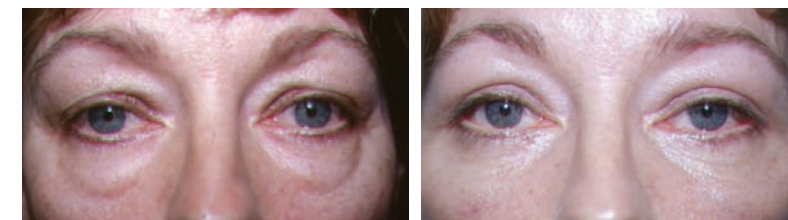
Isolated upper lid surgery takes about 45 minutes to perform, while the upper and lower combination takes

approximately one-and-a-quarter hours. On its own, eyelid surgery is usually performed under a local anaesthetic, but when carried out as part of a full facial rejuvenation it is done under a general anaesthetic.

Patients tend to be back at work after a week for isolated upper eyelid surgery, and after 10 to 12 days for a combined upper and lower eyelid procedure. Bruising and swelling varies from patient to patient but disappears in most people by nine or 10 days.

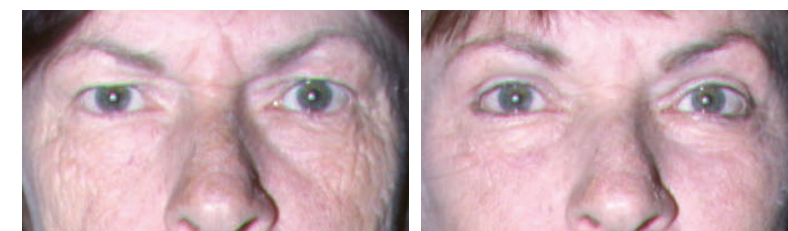
As with any surgery, there are a few possible risks associated with blepharoplasty. Dr Nettle says, 'The main potential risks of the procedure are dry eyes, poor or unusual scarring and drooping of the lower lid.'

If you are worried that your eyes are looking tired, eyelid surgery may be a successful way to brighten your entire face and restore a more youthful appearance. **acsm**



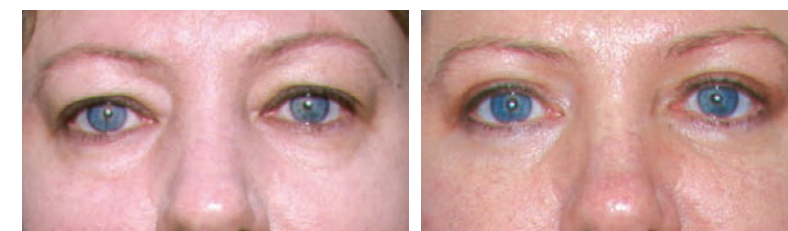
BEFORE

AFTER upper and lower eyelid surgery by Dr Nettle



BEFORE

AFTER upper lid surgery only by Nettle



BEFORE

AFTER upper and lower eyelid surgery by Dr Nettle



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AFTER upper lid surgery only by Dr Nettle