



The Composite Face Lift

by Dr Wong Chin Ho

Advances in surgical rejuvenation of the face

WITH AGE, OUR face loses its shape and takes on a look of haggardness. Many feel disappointed that their faces no longer project the vitality that they have within. Modern face lift can reverse these changes, subtly restore the youthful contours of the face, and bring back the vitality which age has taken away.

Why does traditional face lift look unnatural?

Traditional face lifts are a rather simplistic operation that relies on tightening of the skin and excision (cutting away) of excess skin to achieve the desired result, hence the term 'face lift'. Unfortunately, this often results in an unnatural 'stretched' appearance of the face, a classic tell-tale of a skin face lift. As the skin is not designed to bear any tension, it relaxes rapidly with time, resulting in a short-lived result.

How can a natural look be achieved?

The key to designing the best procedure for the ageing face lies in the understanding of the anatomical changes of the face with ageing. Facial ageing occurs in large part because of laxity of the support layer in the face, called the superficial musculoaponeurotic (SMAS) layer of the face. The SMAS layer is the natural support layer of the face. Accordingly, tightening the SMAS layer together with the subcutaneous fat and skin above it as a single unit (hence the term *Composite Face Lift*) results in a natural and long-lasting facial rejuvenation. This restores the shape and contour of youth to the cheek, jawline and neck. The composite face lift gives a result that is very different from the traditional skin face lift, one that is natural with no tell-tale signs of surgery. Because



tightening is done at a deeper level, the face looks fresh while not appearing excessively pulled. The youthful shape of the face is also predictably restored with the technique.

What are the risks of this technique?

While the clinical effectiveness of the *Composite Face Lift* is that profound lifting and reshaping of the face can be achieved, it was not commonly performed because of the perceived risks as the dissection is performed deeper (the technique is also known as the *Deep Plane Face Lift*) and thus potentially has a higher risk of injuring nerves that control facial expression.

The key to safety with performing this surgery is in the understanding of the anatomy. Recently, the facial soft tissue spaces of the face (Figure 1) have been described and clarified. Using this detailed knowledge of these spaces, *Composite Face Lift* can now be performed safely and reliably by utilising these spaces. Properly performed, the risks of nerve injuries are minimised. As the spaces are natural planes that separate the SMAS, subcutaneous fat and skin composite above and the deep fascia below, dissection through these spaces are bloodless



Facial soft tissue spaces of the face are naturally occurring spaces that are safe and easily opened up during surgery. Using a detailed anatomical understanding of these spaces, the composite facelift can be performed safely and predictably.

and non traumatic. Using this approach, swelling and bruising are also minimised (much less than traditional face lifts) and recovery time from the surgery is much faster.

What areas of the face are addressed with the Composite Face Lift?

The composite facelift addresses the lower face, including the marionette lines and the jawline. A neck lift is also done as part of the composite lift. In many patients with mid-cheek descent, composite facelift can also be used to lift the cheek as well as the nasolabial fold. This extended dissection is called the extended composite face lift.

With these advancements of surgical techniques as well as the results attainable, we are seeing a renaissance of surgical face lifts in our practice. The results are better and more natural, and this can be achieved with reliability and safety. Ultimately, composite face lift will give you a different look than that achievable with traditional face lifts. Patients will look more fresh and vibrant for their age. eh



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