

m+ Hollywood's new youth elixir: Wealthy women are hooked on secret holy grail said to banish wrinkles and plump skin... but doctors warn of shock risk

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For decades women have nipped, tucked and injected their faces to ward off any signs of natural aging.

And, as celebrities now step out looking decades younger - yet somehow completely untouched by a needle or scalpel - whispers have begun to swirl, questioning if they've finally discovered the fountain of youth.

The truth? It's probably fat.

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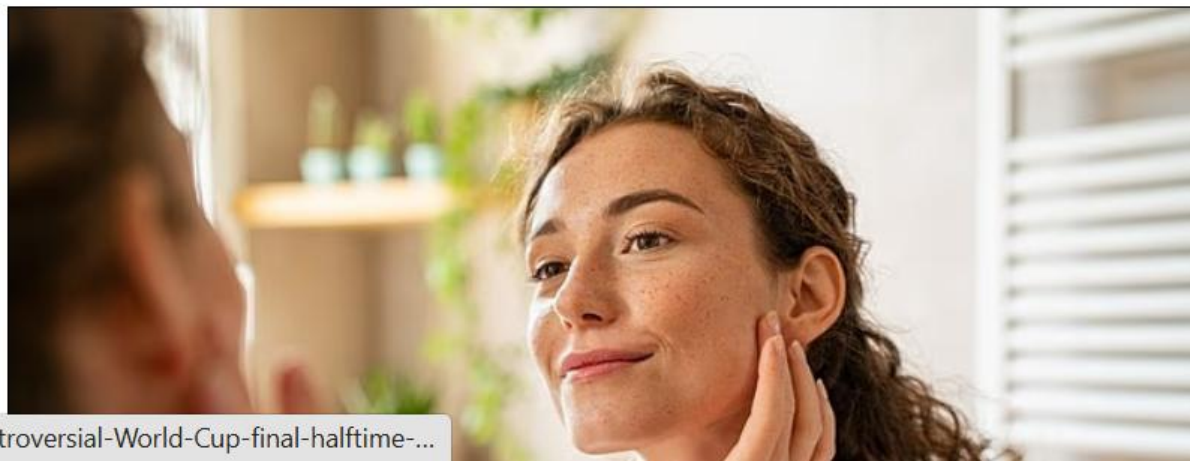
Once a dirty word in the beauty industry, fat has become the holy grail for rejuvenation, creating a plumper – and thereby more youthful – appearance without the dreaded pillowy profile now associated with 'filler face.'

Though it seems counterintuitive after more than a decade of hyaluronic acid and **Botox** injections being the anti-aging procedures du jour, doctors believe that the key to looking younger may indeed be found in that once-loathed 'baby fat.'

As such, facial fat grafting has quietly become one of the fastest-growing cosmetic procedures among women looking for subtle, more natural aesthetic improvements.

Also referred to as facial fat transfer, lipofilling, fat injections or, more colloquially, a 'face BBL,' the costly procedure involves harvesting fat from areas like the stomach or thighs through liposuction before purifying and re-injecting it into the face in areas prone to volume loss, such as the cheeks, temples, under-eyes, jawline and around the mouth.

Once reserved almost exclusively for older patients, however, the injections are now booming in popularity among younger generations, for whom the appeal is preventative – to stave off the aging process and more invasive procedures like facelifts.



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Beverly Hills plastic surgeon Dr Marc Mani told the Daily Mail that he is routinely treating patients in their early thirties who are beginning to notice subtle volume loss rather than significant sagging skin and are seeing the 'earliest signs of facial aging.'

And, according to Dr Babak Azizzadeh, a board-certified facial plastic surgeon based in Beverly Hills, 'it's exploded in all age groups.'

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Before the fat grafting boom, Dr Azizzadeh estimated that patients under the age of 40 who underwent the procedure made up about five percent of his cases – now, that number is more like 20 percent.

'With filler fatigue, many people are turning away and they're dissolving their fillers and they're coming in for fat grafting,' Dr Azzizzadeh, the president-elect of the American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery, told the Daily Mail.

'It's still a big part of the aesthetic industry, but a percentage of those individuals who were asking for fillers are now asking for fat grafting.'

Indeed, fat transfers have been deemed a more 'natural' alternative to dermal fillers – the over-indulgence of which can create an augmented, almost cartoonish appearance that has earned the synthetic injectables a bad rap.

'Patients want restoration, not exaggeration,' Dr Paul Nassif, Beverly Hills plastic surgeon and star of E!'s *Botched*, told the Daily Mail, adding that his clientele now begins this procedure in their thirties and forties.

'Fat uses your own living tissue,' he explained. 'It also contains regenerative cells that can improve skin quality over time.'

The GLP-1 boom, too, has played a pivotal role in the popularity of fat transfers, as patients desperately want to replace volume loss in their now-sunken facial features, dubbed 'Ozempic face.'

One of Dr Nassif's patients, who requested to remain anonymous, told the Daily Mail that she opted to undergo the procedure at 44 when she lost 'a good amount of baby weight' after welcoming her second child following the pandemic. She had put on about 30 pounds, and after losing weight, felt that her face had 'really aged' due to how hollow it appeared.

Dr Nassif took the fat from behind her knees, her lower abdomen and her upper outer

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thighs and put it into her nasolabial folds, temples and under eyes – a procedure that she described as pretty much 'painless.'

Like many younger patients, the California-based woman 'liked that it was something natural from [her] own body and hoped it would be preventative to potentially lessen the need for aesthetic Botox in the future.'

'I have always been scared of fillers, the chance for migration, the need to continue getting them,' she said. 'I thought if I was going to invest thousands into fillers over the years and still eventually need other things in the future, I would rather do the fat transfer.'

She researched the procedure online and was inspired by how many stars her age were returning to 'the spotlight looking young and refreshed and with amazing skin.'

'Whether or not they admit it, I definitely referenced them when discussing what I was hoping for in terms of outcome,' she said.



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One of Dr Nassif's patients, who requested to remain anonymous, told the Daily Mail that she opted to undergo the procedure at 44 when she lost 'a good amount of baby weigh' (Pictured: before, left, and after, right)



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She felt that her face had 'really aged' due to how hollow it appeared (Pictured: before, left, and after, right)

One of the advantages of fat grafting, according to New York City-based facelift specialist Dr Alan Matarasso, is that fat does not trigger the same type of foreign-body responses that can occasionally occur with injectable products, and is also less likely to create the lumpiness sometimes associated with excessive filler.

Indeed, done right, fat grafting is a welcome alternative to synthetic fillers that can achieve a subtly refreshed appearance in which patients look like themselves, just better.

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Done wrong, however, there could be potentially disastrous results.



Just like filler, the face can be 'overfilled' with fat. Unlike filler, it cannot be easily reversed, if at all.

Secret Lives of Mormon Wives star Jessi Draper, 34, learned that first-hand when she went under the knife for multiple cosmetic procedures, including fat grafting, that she said 'ruined [her] life.'

In a TikTok video posted earlier this year, she addressed her dramatically different appearance and expressed her regret at ever going under the knife, revealing that fat was transferred into her lips – which she said she did not ask for – causing them to be 'lumpy.'

In an attempt to reverse it, she got Kybella injections to slim down the fat in her chin, but said she still looked 'f***ing hideous.'



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Secret Lives of Mormon Wives star Jessi Draper went under the knife for multiple cosmetic procedures this year, including fat grafting, that she said 'ruined [her] life'

Dr Sean Alemi, a board-certified facial plastic surgeon based in New York City, told the Daily Mail that it's difficult to know exactly what leads to complications with fat grafting.

'Sometimes it's just an overzealous doctor, or sometimes the esthetic judgment is off,' he said. 'Sometimes people get over-treated because they choose a provider who has a different idea of what's beautiful than what the patient had in mind.'

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Other factors, too, can determine the outcome of the procedure, and because fat grafting popularity comes in the wake of the GLP-1 craze, Dr Alemi said possible weight gain should be taken into account.

'Fat cells that you take out of one part of your body always retain the identity of that part of the body,' he said. 'That fat cell is still going to be a thigh fat cell, even though it resides in the face. And why that's important is that the signals that get sent, if you gain weight in your thighs, guess what's going to happen to those thigh fat cells in your face? They're going to get bigger.'

'So if you go off of Ozempic and you gain 50 pounds or something like that, then I would really be worried that that person's face might change as a result of the weight gain,' he added, though he has yet to see a patient's face expand dramatically in size after fat grafting.

Hormones, too, can cause weight to fluctuate – particularly the changes that accompany menopause – so Dr Alemi tends to 'underdo' fat grafts, which he usually does in tandem with a facelift.

And, because fat grafting patients are getting younger, age also plays a factor, according to Beverly Hills plastic surgeon Dr Behrooz A Torkian. Because while Madonna's fuller face, for instance, has sparked allegations of overdone filler, the surgeon – who did not treat the singer – suspected something else may have been at play.



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Madonna's fuller face, for instance, has sparked allegations of overdone filler, the surgeon – who did not treat the singer – suspected something else may have been at play

'This appeared to be fat graft that had been placed at a younger age, or a time in which the fat was not retaining as much energy for storage,' he said. 'When circumstances changed, the fat grew, creating an overfilled appearance.'

However, according to Dr Azizzadeh, there may be a technique that minimizes the risk of facial fat growth later in life. As he put it, 'the source of where you get the fat is very critical.'

The surgeon, who just completed a study about fat grafts, found that, 'generally speaking, the area that is best, where it doesn't go through a lot of change with Ozempic up or down, with menopause up or down, with aging, is the inner thigh.'

While no surgery can halt the aging process entirely, doctors believe facial fat grafting can at least slow it down in a way that looks undetectable.

'Aging is like time – it continues despite our best efforts,' double board-certified plastic surgeon Dr Lauren Moy said. 'But these tools, especially when combined, can soften the appearance and help achieve the most natural results.'

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