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HATS OFF

Surgery Monday, dinner Saturday? The latest status symbol is a lightning-fast recovery.

BY BETH LANDMAN

ILLUSTRATION BY JENNY KROIK

Hats, scarves, sunglasses: These have long been the sartorial staples of the post-plastic surgery existence. And they still are—even if the world now seems to regard a

facelift with the same nonchalance as a pedicure. Because, for all the seemingly miraculous recoveries touted on social media—look Ma, no scars just weeks later!—the truth

is that you will not wake up from aesthetic surgery instantly beautified. On the contrary, depending on the procedure, you will spend days or weeks harboring the secret fear that

your bloated, bruised, distorted appearance may never morph into a lovely, sculpted one.

That said, we have entered the age of optimization—and that includes optimized recovery. From healing suites in doctors' offices to sections of top hotels reserved for guests fresh from the OR, there is a significant market for minimizing the monstrous phase, so people can rejoin the world in record time.

"I feel that rapid recovery is a crucial part of having a satisfying outcome," says David Rosenberg, a top New York facial plastic surgeon. "If we can have patients out walking five miles after a week, and at a dinner party in three weeks, that is what I shoot for."

Erin Welch runs a service of critical care nurses called Luxurecovery. Concierge-style, they meet patients as they're discharged from surgery and accompany them home, bringing along an IV vitamin buffer, red light, and portable leg compression sleeves to improve circulation and ease swelling. The group has also taken a block of rooms at the AKA Sutton Place, a luxury extended-stay apartment building in Manhattan, where they can care for those who prefer not to interact with their doormen or anyone else in the first week after surgery. "It's a nice, bespoke space, and we have an anti-inflammatory meal plan curated by a chef," Welch says.

Luxurecovery's nurses are trained in post-operative massage, which is less about creating a chiseled look than about removing pockets of swelling. "We make it a nice, relaxing, bougie hour, but we have to be extremely mindful that this is a face that was just operated on," she says.

Dr. Sean Alemi has a dedicated recovery suite in his newly opened Park Avenue office, where patients generally spend the first night post-op. Hyperbaric oxygen is part of his protocol. "I have witnessed significantly reduced swelling and faster healing of incisions," he says. A week later it's time for red light therapy, which is meant to stimulate collagen and elastin production. "It promotes circulation in the soft tissue, and there is compelling evidence that it helps with pain. A lot of athletes use it." At three to four weeks, if there is still swelling, he suggests ultrasound therapy.

Not everyone is initially receptive to the program. Claire Longene, a 62-year-old interior designer and facelift patient of Alemi's, was terrified of the oxygen chamber. "I'm

claustrophobic, and I was prepared to be pounding on the windows, demanding to be let out," she recalls. "But it made me sleep better, and I'm surprised at how quickly I'm healing. I'm also not having anywhere near as much bruising as I generally do."

The Hudson Valley practice of Dr. Manoj Abraham also features recovery suites with their own hyperbaric oxygen chambers. "Based on data, oxygenation promotes more rapid healing," he says. Medical technicians perform lymphatic drainage massage and, later, red light therapy, which he says "decreases inflammation and promotes healing." He also prescribes tranexamic acid before and after the procedure, a medication increasingly being used to minimize bruising.

Hotels began getting in on this post-op action several years ago, and it has paid off. The Four Seasons in Beverly Hills has 12 rooms on the fifth floor dedicated to convalescing; they're accessed through a private underground entrance. Evan Pinchuk, CEO of Immortelle, the company that oversees the medical care at the Four Seasons, says the number of patients staying there has tripled since 2024, and he maintains Immortelle has cut recuperation time by up to 50 percent. His staff asks for genetic testing before surgery to determine the best painkillers to use, and the food options are low in salt and sugar, to reduce inflammation. "If you have a lot of salt after a facelift, you will balloon," he says.

Lasers are also part of the strategy. "We use low-level laser therapy to accelerate wound healing and reduce pain around surgical sites. We wheel it right into the hotel room," Pinchuk says. In New York, Park Avenue dermatologist Macrene Alexiades eradicates bruising almost instantly with Vbeam and Excel V lasers. "You can come in black and blue, as if you were in a bar room fight, and usually that could take three weeks to go away, but now I zap and you walk out pristine," she said.

At Dr. Leif Rogers's offices in Beverly Hills



As evidenced in our July 1971 issue, T&C was covering facelifts long before they became small talk.

and his recovery center in Pasadena, in addition to red light and oxygen, cryotherapy is used to decrease inflammation and pain. "You wheel out of the OR and into your own room," he says. "There are memory foam mattresses, nurses at your beck and call, and food from any restaurant or Erewhon. We've had people stay a

week because they like it so much."

Some doctors feel that recovery should begin before surgery even takes place. "One of the most important things is 'precovery,'" says Beverly Hills facial plastic surgeon Babak Azizzadeh. This includes good skincare, nutrition, and fitness—and also potentially a few vials of hyaluronidase. "Ninety percent of patients have a history of fillers, and I believe that dissolving them before a facelift helps with recovery. We want to minimize the inflammatory process and improve lymphatic drainage, and fillers can impede that."

Lyle Leipziger, chief of plastic surgery at North Shore University Hospital and LIJ Medical Center on Long Island, is cautiously optimistic about—but not wholly convinced of—the efficacy of all protocols. "I use hyperbaric only with difficult healing, and though there is tremendous buzz about light therapy, we haven't seen any real double-blind studies," he says. He does recommend lymphatic drainage and even shows his patients how to use jade rollers to help the process. Meanwhile, the private rooms at his hospitals have found a new purpose.

"We had a facelift patient from East Hampton who chose to stay in a private room for five days and had round-the-clock private duty nurses. They iced her face, made sure she was hydrated, made her smoothies, and ordered in from the best restaurants," Leipziger says. "She actually looked great when she left."

So perhaps you don't need to accumulate such a vast Carmen Sandiego wardrobe before you go under the knife. The data is encouraging, according to Rogers. "The time to normal function is being shortened by 20 to 50 percent versus before I started these protocols," he says. "People can now be camera-ready in two weeks." **T&C**