

face time

Feeling under the gun about going under the knife

BY CHRISTINE LENNON

For a growing number of executive women in their 40s, 50s, and older, the perception of cosmetic surgery as a pursuit of the vain and frivolous is giving way to a new reality. At the peak of their careers, with at least a decade or two of earning power in front of them, they see their futures in sharp focus. But the reflections in the mirror can be a little fuzzy. "I'm impressed by how many patients I meet who are this type of woman," says Manhattan facial plastic surgeon David Rosenberg, M.D. "They're executives, lawyers, bankers—people who want to work longer, not retire at 58. And they want to look like they're on their A-game, to appear as defined and rested as possible without a trace of surgery. That communicates confidence and wellness."

Many women (and men) are acquiring refreshed looks through so-called lunch-hour treatments, which get you out and on your way in the time it takes to have a three-course meal. These include the use of lasers, such as Fraxel and Laser Genesis, the ubiquitous Botox and Restylane injections, and light chemical peels. But there comes a point when the various noninvasive treatments are no longer enough.

The moment of truth, as Rosenberg notes, can be highly subjective: "There are some people who look fabulous at 65 who've never done anything. And there are those at 44 who just look worn out. I think of the lunchtime procedures as polishing agents. What we're talking about with surgery is taking away the sagging that comes with time."

"Do everything you can before the cutting," says Charla Krupp, author of *How Not to Look Old* (Springboard Press). "Once you have a face-lift, people know you're old enough to get a face-lift!" That's always been the risk with the standard-issue lift, which sometimes can result in an unnaturally taut look to the skin.

Over the past decade or so, some surgeons have been paying more attention to how the face fills out after surgery, modifying their techniques to make sure they preserve or restore fullness to the face. These face-lifts place more emphasis on so-called volumizing, although the pro-



cedures do not have a specific medical term. Volumizing lifts tighten the facial structure, restoring youthful contours instead of merely trimming sagging skin. This is accomplished surgically by repositioning the deeper tissue of the face, causing the fat attached to it to move as well.

Since the American Society of Plastic Surgeons does not have a separate designation for these procedures, it's unclear how many of 2007's nearly 120,000 face-lift patients—who paid from \$6,000 to \$25,000, depending on such factors as a surgeon's reputation and extras like eye-lifts—opted for the newer types of surgeries. (*New York Magazine* recently referred to the results of volumizing lifts as "the New New Face").

AS IF WORKPLACE PRESSURES TO HAVE A FACE-LIFT weren't enough, consider escalating media demands on prominent businesspeople and the concerns about how one might look on high-definition television or projected onto a movie-size screen when speaking at a corporate conference. And it's not just the Michelle Pfeiffers of the world making things difficult: There has been widespread speculation in the press about Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi's preternaturally youthful 60-something face. And gossipy New Yorkers have gone so far as to credit a specific surgeon (Dr. Sherrell Aston) with *Vogue* editor Anna Wintour's reported work.

"Look at the women on television—the real pioneers like Lesley Stahl and Diane Sawyer," says Charla Krupp. "Everyone wants to know who did their work. Look how gorgeous Lesley Stahl is. Then there's Morley Safer. He isn't getting a face-lift. . . . It's very unfair. We don't allow women to look like that on television in America. The bar is also much higher for women who have powerful corporate jobs."

While Safer may feel comfortable aging on camera, more and more men are seeing the benefits of going under the knife. George Clooney admitted to an eye-lift on an *Oprah* Oscar special. Michael Douglas and Rob Lowe are

rumored to have had some plastic surgery. According to the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery, men had 1.1 million cosmetic procedures in 2007, up 17 percent from 2006—so it's not just Hollywood aiming to look better. More likely, it's the senior vice president of marketing down the hall. But even with this uptick, men account for only about 9 percent of total procedures.

"Every week I hear of another supersuccessful, accomplished woman in her 50s being let go," says Krupp. "My opinion is that they [cosmetic procedures] should be a tax write-off. You have to look good for work, or the next generation thinks they can get a bit of an edge."

While the idea of having plastic surgery to stay competitive in the business world is gradually gaining acceptance, it still bears a stigma in many corporate suites. Even women in so-called image businesses, like cosmetics and fashion, contend there's risk in owning up to a nip and tuck. "If you're a powerful woman executive, you don't want to look frivolous," says 48-year-old cosmetic company exec Francesca (declining to give her last name), who recently underwent a combination face- and eye-lift.

The irony of a cosmetics executive's reluctance to go public about going under the knife is not entirely lost on Francesca. Still, she insists her industry is hardly immune to the competitive forces that dominate corporate America, and that questions about someone's age are inevitably raised with news of her or his plastic surgery. But even though Francesca was cautious about announcing her intentions beforehand, she says that, with time, she has become a bit more relaxed in discussing her surgery. Indeed, if someone flat-out asks, she's now willing to tell them what she has had done. That degree of openness, Francesca maintains, might be much more difficult in other industries.

Dr. Donald Wood-Smith, a New York plastic surgeon who sees many executive women, says that his patients worry about taking time out for surgical cosmetic procedures, fearing that such absences could potentially "weaken their position in their firms" during a period when many companies are looking for any reason to downsize. There's ageism at play, of course, and since women are the largest consumers of these procedures, there is sexism, too. But for the successful woman who has been conditioned not to let nonbusiness issues (such as child care) enter her work life, the silent approach often seems best. "If she does acknowledge having had plastic surgery, it would be admitting that she needed help," says Jean Cardwell, president of Cardwell Enterprises, a Chicago-based executive-recruitment firm specializing in corporate communications.

"Once you have a face-lift, people know you're old enough to get a face-lift!"



Carolyn Chang, M.D., F.A.C.S.,

a San Francisco-based plastic surgeon whose Bay Area patients are often concerned about concealing the evidence of surgery, offers tips for a smooth post-op transition. The patient's attitude is one factor, she says. "Empirically, patients who are more relaxed going into surgery do really well afterward. Allowing adequate time to rest – optimally two weeks – is most important to minimize swelling and bruising." These measures can also make office re-entry smoother.

Chang suggests to her patients that if they don't already wear glasses, they should start shortly before surgery. Post-procedure specs – event with clear lenses can help conceal marks and bruising around the eyes. "Change your hair color or style", she says. "Get it cut shorter or curl it. It's a good distraction. Tell people you've been dieting. After surgery, features look sharper; it looks like you've lost weight."

Michael Kane, M.D., a plastic surgeon with a Park Avenue practice, has patients who have pretended to take a leave to care for new grandchildren or faked a safari in order to get two weeks out of the office to recuperate. "The number one most limiting factor when it comes to getting cosmetic surgery is scheduling," says Kane. "For the year-end holidays, I'll completely book up a full 9 to 12 months in advance. You can easily take two weeks without making any elaborate excuse, so December 23 and 24 are my busiest days of the year."

After the holidays, it's back to business as usual—but with an advantage. "When this is done well," says Rosenberg, "it's something that allows a person to really continue the life they've taken a long time to build. Why show the wear and tear that happened along the way?"

—Additional reporting by Ernest Beck
A former beauty editor at Harper's Bazaar, Christine Lennon writes for Elle Decor, W, and InStyle, among others.

Email us your thoughts on plastic surgery at flew@forbes.com.