

THE PANDEMIC NIP AND TUCK



Zoom is creating a boom in plastic surgery.



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Amid Zoom boom, demand for plastic surgery soars

By **Carolyne Zinko**

For months during the pandemic, Bay Area professionals have been working from home, connecting over Zoom, and deciding they don't like what they see.

It's not their colleagues they're objecting to, but their own faces — double chins, brow furrows and hooded eyelids. And they're doing something about it, in droves.

"I've never seen so many people want to have facial surgery at the same time, and so urgently, in my 20 years in practice," said Dr. Carolyn Chang, a San Francisco cosmetic plastic surgeon who specializes in faces and breasts.

A dissatisfaction in appearance, coupled with the ability to recover in private at home or behind a mask are driving a boom in cosmetic treatments and facial surgery.

"It's opened the floodgates of pent-up demand," Chang said, "because all of a sudden they see themselves on Zoom, and they call and say, 'I need to get in now.' They don't know when their lives will start again. So in their minds, it's urgent to get it done right now, while the window is open for a stealth recovery."

In Silicon Valley, facial plastic surgeons Drs. Sachin Parikh and David Lieberman, the founders of L&P Aesthetics medical spa, clinic and surgical center in Palo Alto, are also reporting an uptick, as is San Francisco dermatologist Dr. Seth Matarasso, the nation's leading single dispenser of Botox, according to the drug's maker, Allergan.

Matarasso said despite being closed for two months this spring when nonessential medical services were prohibited by the state, he is currently "almost on par" with patient volume compared to the same time last year. Patients want him to minimize their brow furrows, plump up their lips and fill their laugh lines, while procedures on body parts below the clavicle have taken a nosedive for the simple reason that torsos aren't visible in video conferences.

"During this annus horribilis," Matarasso said, "we all need to do something positive for ourselves. Facial fillers and Botox are quick fixes that provide a brief respite from Zoom gloom."

This trend appears to be a national one. "We've heard anecdotally from our member surgeons about an increase in requests for cosmetic facial surgeries since the pandemic hit; whether it's because of Zoom or more downtime is unclear," said Dr. Joseph Losee, president of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, via email, noting that data for 2020 won't be available until spring of 2021.

In June, when the state allowed doctors and nurses to resume nonessential cosmetic facial procedures, medical offices reopened with boosted health and safety procedures to protect patients and staff. L&P Aesthetics has installed Hepa air filtration systems in every room, staggered the schedule to reduce patient overlap and instituted mandatory COVID testing for surgical patients, in addition to other precautions like N95 masks and face shields for staff.



When the pandemic hit, Parikh and Lieberman, who perform operations together, had to reschedule 30 patients' surgeries for later in the year. To keep pace with an increased demand for face-lifts, neck-lifts, lip-lifts, skin resurfacing and rhinoplasty this summer, they began working on weekends and adding more surgery dates to their schedule. The calendar is now so full they are scheduling into the summer of 2021. "Everyone who has been thinking about doing a facial rejuvenation procedure has suddenly decided it's time to do it," said Lieberman via email.

At Chang's office, most of the current demand is for facial work like face-lifts, which run about \$20,000.

"I remember looking at myself on Zoom early in the pandemic and thinking, 'You've got to be kidding me — this is worse than I thought,'" said one of Chang's patients, a 50-year-old biotech executive from Marin who underwent a face- and neck-lift and requested anonymity.

Meanwhile, so-called "mommy" breast and body procedures have been delayed, Chang said, because patients have less downtime while children are doing remote school.

While working from home has benefits for recovery, it also poses temptations. Chang noticed that some of her patients have impeded their own recoveries by failing to give themselves enough time to heal from lower eyelid lifts. Getting back on the computer too soon has led to a few instances of minor bleeding when the friction of eye movement has loosened sutures on the inner rim of the lower lid, she said.

Others are having surgery to boost not just their looks, but also their mood. That was the case for a 49-year-old Silicon Valley educator, who underwent a \$23,000 face- and neck-lift at L&P Aesthetics as a personal pick-me-up in September and is thrilled with the result.

"Amid a tough year, while caring for my family, I'm in the boat with everybody else — it's not easy," said the woman, who asked to be identified only as Jennifer L. "But if you can do something for yourself, whether color your hair blue or take a COVID test and get on a flight to Hawaii, if that's what you choose to do, then to each his own."

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S.F. cosmetic plastic surgeon Dr. Carolyn Chang preps a patient for and begins a blepharoplasty, or eyelid surgery, at her office. Says Chang: "I've never seen so many people want to have facial surgery at the same time, and so urgently, in my 20 years in practice."