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Need to Know: Lip Injections



Read our lips: Between volume loss and deepening vertical lines, your kisser ages faster than the rest of your face. There are no creams, beauty rituals, or supplements that really help. At some point, not even the most dynamic lip liner can disguise the issues. But thanks to hyaluronic acid-based lip injections, if a prettier pout is on your agenda, you can have just that — without looking like a cast member of *The Real Housewives*.

THE SCIENCE

While 1990s lip injections were collagen based, today's **hyaluronic acid** injectables are both safer and longer lasting. A natural sugar already found in our bodies, hyaluronic acid not only attracts and binds water to plump skin, its particles are gradually — and naturally — absorbed. When injected into lips, and other places in the face, it's a temporary boost that lasts about six months. Two brands, Juvederm and Restylane, are the leaders in the U.S. market.

Restylane Silk was the first FDA-approved product specifically designed for lip augmentation (and smoothing wrinkles around the mouth). It plumps lips while providing definition and lift.

Juvederm's Vollure XC is FDA approved to **fill laugh lines** in the face; doctors are also using it to fill lips. A similar product, Volbella XC has a lower concentration of hyaluronic acid for more a subtle effect. Juvaderm Ultra XC provides a plumper lip with more horizontal spread than lift and lasts longer (up to a year).

THE BENEFITS

Lips are often not a consideration in our skin care regimens, and lipsticks and lip liners can dry and age rather than condition lips. Add the fact that loss of collagen means lips grow thin and lose their shape. Habits like smoking and drinking from straws don't do the skin around the mouth any favors. Genetics also plays a role in the size and shape of lips and the way the skin around them wrinkles. Done proactively and consistently, lip injections can remedy much, if not all, of that and help you maintain a fuller pout and an overall more youthful appearance.

THE PROCESS

Let us be clear: Lip injections hurt. Lips are among the most sensitive parts of the body. They have a high concentration of touch receptors, and the areas of the brain that receive messages from those touch receptors are much larger than the areas that receive messages from less sensitive places on the body, such as the back. So a needle in your delicate lips? Yes, it hurts.

Luckily, topical numbing cream goes a long way to dull the pain, and injectables are usually infused with the anesthetic lidocaine (let your injector know if you have a lidocaine allergy). And given the small surface area, the procedure is relatively brief. It helps to close your eyes, take deep breaths, and imagine your **happy place**.

An ice pack immediately following and for a few hours after treatment will help you manage pain, swelling, and bruising. Sleeping with your head elevated the night after can also help keep swelling at bay. Doctors advise acetaminophen only; aspirin and ibuprofen will exacerbate bruising.

NO DUCK LIPS AND OTHER TIPS

According to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, a lip augmentation procedure is done every 20 minutes, and it is believed to be as mainstream as teeth whitening. Still, you should educate yourself, proceed with caution, and find an experienced reputable injector.

Some people think you should trust only a board-certified cosmetic dermatologist or plastic surgeon for lip injections. However, we know there are some excellent nurses who are certified injectors, and we wouldn't hesitate to see someone with a solid reputation among peers and patients. Google around. Read reviews. Ask your friends.

Once you've decided to go the lip-injection route, be judicious, says board-certified cosmetic dermatologist Dr. Karyn Grossman, "... if it's overdone, plumping [lips] up as big as possible, the filler can act as a tissue expander, permanently stretching the skin, causing lips to sag and deflate when the filler eventually degrades ...". This is particularly true for the upper lip, which lengthens and sags as we age — so take it easy!

Double-board-certified plastic surgeon Dr. Suzanne Trott maintains that too much filler in the upper lip is the No. 1 reason for duck lips.

For a week prior to treatment, avoid alcohol, aspirin, ibuprofen, and allergy medications; they increase chances of bleeding and bruising. Arnica gel may lessen bruising when applied pre- and post-injection. Anecdotal evidence suggests that eating pineapple two or three times a day for a couple of days prior will also reduce bleeding and bruising.

First timers should brace themselves for the swelling. Some people experience a lot — enough to find themselves wondering if they've ruined their face. But it does subside, and within two weeks, your lips should settle into a beautiful place. But if after that time, you have buyer's remorse, don't pout. Lip plumpers are dissolvable with a different injectable that takes only a few hours to break down the hyaluronic acid and return your lips to their original state.

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