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## **Q's and A's about Blepharoplasty**

The periorbital region (the area around the eyes) is one of the key facial expressive areas. Together, with the eyes, they are an important indicator of our emotions. Unfortunately, there are numerous environmental and hereditary factors acting over time which cause the very thin tissues of the eyelids to become stretched and slack. As such, this is one of the first regions to show the signs of ageing and contributes to a prematurely aged or sad look. Thankfully, there is much a skilled Plastic Surgeon can do to reverse these changes which occur with the passage of time. Rejuvenation of the eyelids (blepharoplasty) is one the most common outpatient cosmetic surgery procedures performed today.

## **Who is best suited for this surgery?**

Generally speaking, anyone who is unhappy with the appearance of their periorbital region may be a candidate for surgery. Those who will benefit from this most are those who have obvious saggy upper eyelids giving them an old or tired appearance. Occasionally the upper eyelid skin can become so droopy that the visual field can be obstructed. Those who have puffiness, bags or fine wrinkles of the lower eyelids can also benefit from blepharoplasty to rejuvenate the periorbital region. Private insurance companies recognise the disability that severe cases of upper lid excess causes and it is wise to check to see if your policy covers you for such surgery.

## **What will the consultation involve?**

The initial consultation takes 30 minutes during which a full assessment and discussion can occur within a relaxed time frame. A thorough history is taken which will give you ample opportunity to describe your reasons for wanting the surgery and any concerns you may have. Other health issues are explored to ensure your safety throughout the process. Specific enquiry will be made about diabetes and thyroid disease. Examination of the eyes and periorbital region will take several minutes as various functions of your eyes and surrounding structures are assessed. Measurements of critical landmarks and distances will be taken in addition to clinical photographs.

A second consultation takes place a week or two before the planned surgery date where any further questions may be answered and the surgery discussed for a second time.

### **Am I awake or asleep when the operation takes place?**

This surgery lends itself well to “twilight anaesthesia” which can take many forms. Essentially, you are sedated via an intravenous drip while the operation happens under local anaesthetic (by injections). You are therefore conscious but drowsy during the procedure. You will be monitored throughout the operation. The amount of sedation used depends on your requirements and can be increased or reversed at any time. The surgery can also be done under local anaesthetic alone or a full general anaesthetic at your request. Most people prefer the full anaesthetic for operations on all four lids at once (quad blepharoplasty).

### **What happens during the operation?**

After satisfactory sedation has been achieved, the surgeon carefully marks out the proposed skin incisions and then infiltrates with local anaesthetic. The surgery involves excision of the skin and sometimes the underlying muscle. Following this, the fat beneath is assessed and small amounts of this may be removed. Generally speaking, this fat is preserved or repositioned rather than resected as was the practice a decade or more ago. The skin is closed with a fine removable nylon suture.

### **Is there any difference between upper and lower lid surgery?**

Rejuvenation of the lower lid is a much more exacting procedure and is technically more challenging than upper lid blepharoplasty. The dissection is more extensive and as a result of this the lower lid can remain swollen for some weeks following the surgery. A recognised complication of lower lid surgery can result from over-resection of skin. This can lead to a contracted lower lid where the white of the eye (sclera) is visible beneath the cornea. A well trained surgeon assesses this pre-operatively and will undertake judicious skin resection in order to avoid this potential problem.

### **What can I expect after the operation?**

The upper lid in particular has very thin skin and can swell and become bruised following surgery. For this reason surgeons recommend cold packs for the first 48-72 hours post-operatively. Any bruising is usually mild and gradually fades to a yellowish tinge over the first week to ten days as the pigments in the bruise break down. The sutures are removed at 5 days. You may need to wear dark glasses for the first week or two which will help protect from the sunlight and also disguise any swelling or bruising. Make up and contact lenses can be worn at ten days to two weeks. It will take a full 6-12 weeks for the eyes to settle completely following eyelid surgery.

### **Why should I ask for a Plastic Surgeon to do my operation?**

Your Plastic Surgeon will have undergone sixteen years of training, six of which (at least) have been under the direct supervision of fully qualified senior plastic surgeons in order to gain the formal qualification FRACS (Plast.). Not only are plastic surgeons trained to undertake cosmetic eyelid surgery, they are also capable of repairing other defects resulting from lacerations, burns, fractures, tumours and a variety of other conditions. Throughout their training, attention to detail, soft tissue handling, precision and aesthetic ideals are instilled into the trainees by senior surgeons. These same skills and exacting technique are utilised when operating on the delicate tissues about the eye to minimise complications, hasten healing and allow a more predictable result.

### **What other qualifications should I look for?**

Those plastic surgeons who focus on cosmetic surgery and have a passion for this sub-specialty area can be elected to memberships in various organisations such as the New Zealand Foundation for Cosmetic Plastic Surgery, ASAPPS (Australasian Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery) and ISAPS (International Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery). Prerequisite qualifications for membership to these groups include FRACS (Plast.), overseas Fellowship training in Cosmetic Surgery and a significant component of Cosmetic Surgery in their day to day practice. If your surgeon is a member of the above groups you can be sure they have the necessary skills, experience and backing to provide you with an optimal outcome.