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The pursuit of agelessness

Addressing the underlying cause of skin aging through your own fat

by Kim Reyes - Palanca
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Loss of volume—it's the silent enemy. When our skin begins to age, we automatically look out for anti-wrinkle solutions. The truth is, the real culprit here is sagging. Sagging causes the more recognizable and noticeable skin stigma such as fine lines or wrinkles.

Dr. Alfredo Callanta, medical director of Empire Centre for Regenerative Medicine and renowned plastic, reconstructive, and aesthetic surgeon in non-surgical fat grafting in Asia, believes in the rejuvenating and restorative powers of fat. "When you lose volume, your skin sags. The best thing to correct that problem is to add volume. And there's no better way than by adding fat," he confirms. Fat has been known to have the highest concentration of mesenchymal cells, responsible for regeneration and repair in the body. By utilizing fat to bring back volume and vitality, one can achieve a non-surgical face lift.

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Empire Centre for Regenerative medicine offers a non-surgical alternative to the traditional face lift—fat injections that pump up skin and remove skin stigmas like fine lines and wrinkles

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THE ANATOMY OF AGING SKIN

When it comes to skin, unfortunately, what you don't know can hurt you. Given the amazing ability of the skin to heal and restore itself, through time, its self-sustaining properties slow down. Before seeking out surgery, understanding how skin behaves holds the secret to non-invasive solutions. "What happens is that there are structural changes in the skin: the collagen decreases, the fats atrophy, the muscles of the bone shorten, and there's bone remodeling. When these things happen in the skin—the facial shape, balance, and proportion change—it sags. These are the problems of the aging face," explains Dr. Callanta.

Progressive skin atrophy (continuous shrinking and deterioration) causes our skin to sag and eventually develop tell-tale signs of aging. Instead of the traditional surgical face lift, Dr. Callanta offers a different approach, "Removing skin is not the solution, adding volume is."

A deflated balloon comes to mind. The old-school ones printed with a birthday greeting on it and filled with helium. The wrinkling in that deflated balloon can get to me. That, and the sight of a prune. But for clarification's sake, let's take Dr. Callanta's fruit analogy instead. "As you age, you lose volume so there's wrinkling and excess skin. If you pull that excess skin and remove it, you will look like a pea. What you want to achieve is, if you are a grape and become a raisin, we try to restore you back into a grape."

A WEEKEND FIX

Fat Autograft Muscle Injection or FAMI is Dr. Callanta's preferred and recommended solution over surgical face lift. The procedure involves no cuts, no incisions or sutures and takes about an hour. With no bruising, minimal swelling and negligible to no downtime, it has been dubbed as the "weekend fix." The outpatient procedure doesn't stop you from doing your normal day-to-day activities, except avoiding sun exposure, exercising, and swimming for two weeks.

Essentially, what fat grafting is aiming for is to restore skin's youth by injecting fat to enhance volume—as opposed to surgically removing skin to tighten the face and ending up with that familiar "windblown" look (all that tugging and tucking that result in an obvious, not to mention jarring, "pulled up" look). By harvesting fat from a patient's body to provide an added lift, it raises skin and smoothens out wrinkles for a more natural look—a systematic way of using fat, as the doctor calls it.

"Through syringe liposuction, which may be done under local anesthesia, harvested fat is refined by centrifugation and placed in the facial muscles. The pure fat in the middle is placed in a syringe and injected back into the areas such as the forehead, temporal area, cheeks, around the mouth, jaw..." Dr. Callanta explains. The effect gives a more natural, youthful appearance with improved skin texture and skin tone, minimized pores, dewy and glowing skin. The improvement progresses in a few days, weeks, months: a face lift that gets better with some time.

Adifill Fat Grafting, which originates from FAMI, is utilized to restore volume in the face, breasts, and body. But Dr. Callanta warns, "Not all fat [transfers] are created equal. Other doctors are using fat as a filler. This results in a lot of bruising because they get the fat and inject it subcutaneously. Our technique is to inject the fat just above the bone." Dr. Callanta's technique was influenced by his two mentors, pioneers in fat grafting French plastic surgeon Dr. Roger Amar and Dr. Roger Khouri, whose patients include royalty.

ITS APPLICATIONS

Adifill fat grafting has been found useful in many other applications such as body contouring and shaping, butt and breast enhancement and augmentation, and even lip augmentation. "The beauty of using fat is that it is unlike fillers where you get fish lips or the lips look inverted," says Dr. Callanta.

Fat grafting can also be combined with other procedures like an upper and lower blepharoplasty, hair transplant, and MACS (Minimal Access Cranial Suspension) face lift. It may also be done alongside Botox. According to Dr. Callanta, "When you want to improve fine lines and wrinkles, specifically the upper part of face, Botox doesn't correct the problem but just improves wrinkles and lines. Combining Botox with fat grafting gives a more natural effect."

In other countries like Brazil, fat grafting is used in burn patients to assist in wound healing. Fat grafting can also address deformities like helping breast cancer survivors who have undergone mastectomies.

A HOLISTIC APPROACH

Dr. Callanta reminds his patients that despite treatments, the aging process continues, and they still need to maintain a skincare regimen as well as good diet and nutrition, and get enough exercise and sleep—what he generally calls a healthy perspective.



Your unwanted fat can be put to good use. Fat grafting has been found to rejuvenate skin and restore a youthful glow to the face

Factors like diet and lifestyle can accelerate the aging process. Aside from the old age, some of Dr. Callanta's patients include those who have gone through weight loss that caused their face to lose roundness on their cheeks, gym addicts whose faces become gaunt, and not surprisingly, heavy smokers as well. Ideally, one shouldn't lose too much weight to maintain volume on the skin. Weight loss can reduce the effects. "Like when you go to the gym or do a lot of cardio like running, your face becomes dry and the cheeks become flat. The face elongates," he adds.

The lifting and rejuvenating effects of Adifill fat grafting can last a period of three to five years and generally, with just as little as 5-10cc of fat to re-inject to restore and prolong results.

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