

Rapid Recovery in Plastic Surgery

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Plastic Surgery is at the forefront of trends in less invasive procedures and rapid recovery. The growth of the non-invasive cosmetic market demonstrates the desire and demand from patients for minimal downtime balanced with the expectation of significant results.

Anesthesia Options
Facial plastic procedures were typically done only under general anesthesia during my training. With advances in anesthesia agents and techniques, most facial plastic surgery (with the possible exception of rhinoplasty) can be comfortably performed with IV sedation or local anesthesia with relaxation. Body liposuction can similarly be performed comfortably with these techniques. In addition to the obvious recovery and cost advantages, many patients are hesitant to undergo general anesthesia especially for elective procedures.

Less Invasive Surgical Alternatives

The trend in facial plastic surgery has been toward shorter incision and shorter flap techniques for facelifting. Drains are no longer always necessary, and complication risks are potentially lower. As long as tightening of the SMAS (superficial musculoaponeurotic system) is performed, results are significant and long lasting. As patients are frequently seeking procedures at a younger age, these techniques balance maximizing results with minimizing recovery. Laser fibers incorporated with facelifting techniques can minimize bruising, thereby facilitating recovery and also potentially enhancing skin tightening.

The development of fractional lasers transformed skin resurfacing. Fractional technology heats microcolumns of tissue for nonablative stimulation of collagen and elastin. For ablative resurfacing, microcolumns of tissue are removed, healing with new collagen and elastin, and leaving “bridges” of normal tissue to facilitate more rapid healing and reduce risk of complications.

Similarly, for body procedures such as liposuction, advances such as laser or ultrasonic liposuction, can minimize trauma and reduce bleeding and bruising. Recovery time may be reduced by as much as 50% with laser liposuction along with reduction in pain levels postoperatively compared to liposuction alone.

Technological Options

Technology is always rapidly changing, and has created so many new options to address facial aging changes nonsurgically or minimally invasively. Facial tightening procedures, typically using radiofrequency energy, can stimulate collagen and elastin in the skin. Ultherapy is a targeted ultrasound energy that can penetrate to the SMAS depth, creating a “lifting” effect of the brow and neck. Newer options combining modalities such as microneedling with radiofrequency energy (such as Infini and the newer Vivace) stimulate collagen and elastin with both healing and heating of tissue.

Present and Future Advances

The future of rapid recovery in facial plastic surgery will likely lie in biologics such as platelet rich plasma and adipose-derived stem cells. Platelet rich plasma, which concentrates growth factors, is currently being used both topically to speed healing from ablative laser resurfacing or microneedling techniques (“Vampire facial”) or applied under facelift flaps. The regenerative potential of growth factors and stem cells may not only be the future of rapid recovery but also anti-aging.



Dr. Elizabeth Whitaker is Double Board Certified by both the American Board of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery and the American Board of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery and has been elected a Fellow in the American College of Surgeons. She is the Founder of Atlanta Face & Body.