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## **Safe, subtle facelifts can help you look as young as you feel**

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"Wow, did you do something to your hair?"

"Did you lose weight?"

"Have you been on vacation?"

That's how I know a face lift operation has been a success. Friends, family, and coworkers know you look great, but can't pinpoint the reason why.

It is important to understand the goals of any rejuvenation procedure.

Do you want to look younger? It is possible to have a stunning, youthful appearance after a facelift but look ... not quite the same.

Technically, singer Kenny Rogers had a good result but he doesn't look like Kenny Rogers. Some patients want to look different, because they have never been satisfied with their flat cheek bones or retrusive chins. But for the majority of patients, looking like themselves seven to 10 years ago is about right.

The key words in successful face lifting, in my mind, are: safe, subtle and natural.

Safety means the procedure is designed to avoid complications that can occur. Avoiding extensive undermining of the skin means fewer healing problems. Refraining from deeper, extensive dissections prevents injuries to critical nerves that move muscles on the face. Shorter scars mean quicker recovery times and less swelling and bruising.

A subtle, but striking effect results from rearrangement of the fat pads and muscles of the face. Much of what we perceive as aging is not so much wrinkles as the redistribution of volume lower on the face. It is critical to replace muscle and fat in their original location. By doing so, a youthful look is achieved. Simply stretching skin creates an unnatural "done" look. It is this look that patients fear most, and it can be avoided.

A natural look comes from lifting sagging jowls, excess neck skin and the heavy lines around the nose and mouth that result from sagging cheeks. By lifting the deeper structures of the face, an aged, heavy look is replaced by a more youthful one. The extra skin is gently redraped and not "pulled," avoiding the distortion around the eyes and mouth that shout, "Facelift!"

Most facelifts can be comfortably performed under local anesthesia with sedation such as Valium or Versed.

The procedure takes from three to five hours, and patients return home about an hour after surgery with a friend or family member. Light activity is recommended for a couple of weeks. Bruising and swelling are different with everyone, but most patients can be socially presentable with makeup in seven to 10 days. For a major event such as a big trip or a wedding, it is best to wait four weeks or so.

Incisions are placed just in front of the ear and along the hairline in the sideburn area. They are well hidden in the natural skin creases and just behind the hair. If there is a lot of extra neck skin, an incision behind the ear will be required as well. Occasionally, an incision under the chin will be needed for excess fat or to treat neck bands.

Facelift incisions generally heal very well, but let your doctor know if you have a tendency to scar. Contemporary facelifting is characterized by shorter incisions and more rapid recovery times.

As with any operation, complications can occur with a facelift. Early postoperative bleeding can result in a hematoma, which is a blood collection under the skin which must be drained. Infection, fortunately, is rare, as are problems with healing.

The most feared complication is damage to a facial nerve, resulting in weakness of facial muscles. This is almost always temporary, but very distressing. I feel techniques that minimize this risk still provide great results.

My patients have told me that they want to look like themselves, but without the tired, heavy, saggy or droopy features that time has settled upon them. Some feel their business or personal relationships are effected by the perception that they appear unenergetic.

If you are young at heart, but the mirror says otherwise, there are safe, subtle, and natural methods to help you look like you feel.

*Dr. Alan Muskett practices plastic and reconstructive surgery at Billings Plastic Surgery. For more information, go to his [Web site](#).*