BY SUSAN WILLIAMSON

FAT IS BEAUTIFUL

YOUR OWN TISSUE CAN BE USED TO RESTORE THE FULLNESS OF YOUTH

BEING WELL-PADDED with fat was a sign of beauty and health—once upon a time. For most of us nowadays, though, the less we have of it, the better. We've become obsessed with our body-fat ratio, tackling the problem with exercise and diet. And when all else fails, we resort to liposuction to cut down on the pudge. But fat isn't all bad. In fact, it's actually this tissue that helps give the face its youthful curve. Unfortunately, as we get older, the fat that we have starts to loosen and sag.

"The problem with the aging face is not really excess tissue, it's a lack of fullness," explains New York plastic surgeon, Dr. Sydney Coleman. "I see patients in their forties and fifties with bodies in great shape, but their faces look gaunt." Coleman compares this process to a piece of chiffon whose backing is beginning to detach. "As we age, the face gets smaller, but the skin stays the same size, so it's this lack of structure that causes sagging and wrinkles." Coleman's solution to this problem is to use your own fat as a natural filler to plump up those areas where gravity has taken over. It's a procedure he's trademarked as "LipoStructure," and one he's performed over 5,000 times.

There are two distinct advantages to using your own tissue. "Because the fat cells are harvested from your own body you won't have an allergic reaction and, once established, there is every indication it's permanent," says Coleman. He began experimenting with what he calls "structural fat grafting" in the 1980s when patients came to him for help after suffering complications from liposuction—usually tissue irregularities or the removal of too much fat.

While it makes sense to remove fat from one area of the body and use it to enhance another, regular liposuction techniques can't be used because they literally "boil up" your fat cells. "This is living tissue that we're dealing with and you have to treat it with respect or it dies," remarks Coleman. "In order to establish a blood supply in the augmentation site, you need intact fat cells with connective tissue attached." To achieve this, Coleman designed a special blunt-tipped canula which doesn't damage the living tissue.

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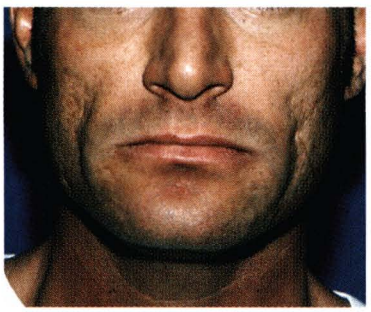
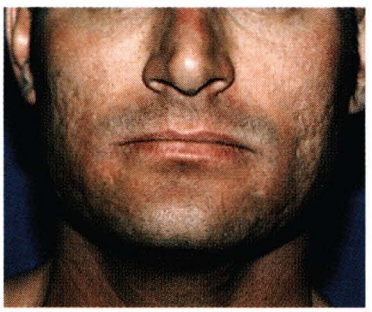
By early 1987, Coleman was successfully performing LipoStructure on the face. His first patients were women who wanted to avoid using collagen in the nasolabial folds and lips. Later there were men who requested a wider forehead and jaw. Now, most of Coleman's patients are between 45 and 60 years old; 35 to 40 per cent are male; and the most popular site for LipoStructure is still the face. "My goal is always to restore fullness and volume," he says. "A facelift involves excising and tightening, but when you combine it with LipoStructure you are adding those proportions that are important for beauty and youth."

Coleman says fat grafting works particularly well in the cheek area and under the eyes. "Below the eyelid, there's usually too little fullness rather than too much," he comments. "I also do LipoStructure above the eyebrows to restore fullness, the loss of which causes the upper eyelids to sag." Other popular sites for fat grafting include >





This paient had fat-grafting to help reduce the depth of his acne scars. He is shown before (left) and one-and-a-half years later (right).

While the face is the most popular area for LipoStructure, it yields excellent results for hands as you can see in the before photo (left) and at the five-year follow-up appointment (right).

Courtesy of Dr. Sysney Coleman

Attractive beforehand (left), this woman had fat grafting to add a more youthful, rounded look to her face–and after two-and-a-half years, it still looks good (right).

the lips, jawline, neck and hands.

Briefly, here's how fat grafting works. First, cells are harvested from a donor site on your body—usually the abdomen, thighs or love handles. Next, they're purified in a centrifuge to remove oil and other material. Then tiny incisions are made in the area where fullness is needed, and the cells are injected. Coleman uses a crisscross technique which places fat in several layers of tissue. A typical lip augmentation requires two incisions; a couple of teaspoons of fat; and 200 to 300 passes of the needle. But don't worry, you'll receive sedation and a local anesthetic. This particular procedure takes about an hour, and both incisions are closed with a small stitch which Coleman says heals perfectly.

Since perfecting his procedure, Coleman has travelled all over the world sharing his techniques with other doctors.

Although fat grafting can be used to augment calves, pecs and biceps, it's not often done. "I always hesitate before putting fat into a functioning muscle," say Coleman.

With fat grafting, the patient is looking at a long recovery time. "The first week you look like a monster and the second, a beat-up younger version of yourself. By the third week you are starting to see the benefits and, from weeks three to five, patients love the way they look," says Coleman. But the swelling can last up to 16 weeks, and bruising sometimes occurs. Because your own fat is used for the procedure, complications are rare. Infection is possible, though, so it's important that you choose a surgeon who is experienced in performing the procedure. Irregularities like scarring occasionally appear, and clumping may be seen through very thin skin in older people.

It's best to be at the weight you plan to stay at before undergoing this procedure, because a weight loss of ten per cent afterwards can make a dramatic change in your augmentation.

A follow-up of 2,000 of Coleman's patients has shown that the results of his procedure have remained stable for ten years. Because most of us respond well to fat grafting, this technique appears to be a particularly effective way to help give our appearance a more youthful and appealing look. ◙

Editorial Sources:

- *Dr. Sydney Coleman, 212-570-1808, www.lipostructure.com*