

# Face Lifting after Massive Weight Loss

Patients undergoing bariatric surgery for severe obesity are often left with excess, sagging skin, affecting all areas of the body – including the face. This can negatively impact one's body image and self-esteem, despite the powerful achievement of significant weight loss. **DR VERNON CHING** discusses treatment options for facial rejuvenation after massive weight loss (MWL)

**O**bese patients commonly have full round faces with heavy necks, and often look younger than their real age. However after MWL surgery, they usually visit plastic surgeons as they are unhappy with their facial appearance. Bariatric procedures being performed today frequently result in patients shedding 50 kg or more.

Therefore, there is a significant loss of facial fat volume with a noticeable increase in skin laxity. Younger patients (or those older patients who have good skin elasticity) may be lucky enough to escape this “deflated beach ball” appearance, but many do not. While skin laxity of the body can be hidden by clothing, unfortunately facial changes have no place to hide.

## The Negative Impact of MWL

As fat decreases, facial skin becomes saggy, giving the jowls a droopy, “St Bernard like look”, with the neck skin having a “turkey-like” appearance. It is paradoxical that MWL pa-



tients feel on top of the world.

Massive weight loss patients are healthier, thinner, no longer diabetic or hypertensive, have more energy and have never felt better about themselves. At the same time however, they have never looked older. In the pursuit of better health, they have traded their facial youthful fullness for a more aged appearance.

Looks can have an adverse psychological effect on patients affecting their work and social relationships. People involved with sales, or in professions where appearance is critical need to look their best.

Weight loss also worsens the natural ageing process. In youth, the face is like a plump grape, but sadly with age it begins to look more like a raisin. Volume loss accentuates facial shadows, lines, and wrinkles; which deepen over time. The round plumpness of youth vanishes and a gaunt, tired appearance replaces it.

### Treatment Modalities

Fortunately, cosmetic surgical operations can rejuvenate the face by replacing volume and removing excess skin. A facelift combined with a neck lift is an excellent combination for patients who have had MWL. Fat grafts are used to re-establish a

more youthful facial contour by restoring lost volume.

Compared to the typical facelift patient, patients with MWL need facial fat replacement, increased tightening of the cheek and neck skin, as well as more extensive elevation of the underlying muscle and other facial tissues. Most patients combine a face and neck lift with eyelid surgery, forehead lifts, or facial resurfacing.


Excellent aesthetic outcomes are achieved using these techniques. Patients have significant improvement in facial fullness and shape, with no major complications.

These results are also durable, provided bariatric patients maintain their weight at a stable level. Particular attention needs to be paid to manage these patients at the time of their operation, as their reduced absorptive capacity following bariatric bypass surgery may make them susceptible to wound healing problems.

Patients after MWL have dramatic changes in appearance, affecting

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both the body and the face. Very often, we place significant importance on the initial life-saving, bariatric operation and justifiably so. It is, however, vital to acknowledge "the way we look affects the way we feel".

The quality of life aspect is also equally important to these patients - and by performing facial rejuvenation procedures we can not only make them look younger and feel better about themselves, but also give them a face to match their new and healthier body. 

### References

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