

The Risks of Lip Lifts That You Don't See on Instagram

One surgeon says it's the procedure he says “no” to most often.

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Photo: Huy Luong

The surgery is a relatively straightforward affair: After measuring and marking the upper lip, surgeons remove a bullhorn-shaped strip of skin and fat to reveal the SMAS layer, which is the connective tissue covering the muscle that encircles the mouth. Working along the lower edge of the incision, they separate a few millimeters of SMAS from the underlying muscle to create a small tissue flap, which allows them to move the lip freely and place sutures deep in the SMAS in order to avoid putting tension on the surface incision. (If you're more of a visual learner—I get it—this is a great [step-by-step video](#) of the procedure.) Tension is the enemy, of course, because it leads to widened scars and also risks pulling down and distorting the base of the nose. “If the incision looks tension-free before the final layer of stitches goes in [to the skin], you're most likely to get an inconspicuous scar,” explains [Adam Kolker](#), MD, a double board-certified plastic surgeon in New York City.

4. The lip lift isn't for everyone.

Unlike 10 years ago, when the suggestion of a lip lift left patients bewildered, says Dr. Kolker, “now people are coming in requesting a lip lift, but they have no idea what it means and they're not even remotely candidates for it.” In the age of trending treatments, he adds, “everyone thinks they're a candidate for everything.”

5. Some skin types may be more prone to obvious scars.

While “it's impossible to predict with 100% certainty what the quality of the scar is going to be,” says Dr. Kolker, most surgeons agree that melanated skin is generally [thicker](#) than Caucasian skin and more likely to form raised or pigmented scars. But not all surgeons are aligned in thinking that younger skin will have a more exuberant scar response, or in ruling patients out based on age alone.