



Cosmetic Eyelid Surgery

by Michael H. Boyle, M.D

The area around the eyes is one of the most commonly cited reasons for a patient to seek the advice of a plastic surgeon. Blepharoplasty is the surgical technique designed to re-contour and re-juvenate the eyelids. Excess skin, muscle, and fat are removed from the eyelids using incisions hidden in the natural creases of the face, or on the inner surface of the eyelid. Depending on the situation, this surgery can be either reconstructive or cosmetic. Both upper and lower eyelids can be addressed, along with the adjacent areas of the brow and cheek.

When evaluating a patients for eyelid surgery, the first step is to identify the problem they are focused on. Some patients describe difficulty reading, driving, or doing other visual activities. In these cases, testing can be done to verify how much their peripheral vision is obscured by their eyelids. When associated with visual field loss, sometimes an upper eyelid blepharoplasty is covered by insurance. An ophthalmologist is able to evaluate and care for such cases.

For other patients, there is no visual complaint. These patients notice that their eyes look smaller and more tired. They may also notice a protrusion of fat bags or loose skin on both their upper and lower lids. For women, a common complaint is difficulty putting makeup on because of excess skin. In these cases, the surgery is cosmetic. Because the lower eyelid does not obscure the vision, a lower lid blepharoplasty is almost always cosmetic.

Next, it is important to determine the source of the problem. With

regards to the upper eyelid, three things may droop: the eyebrow, the skin in front of the eyelid, and the eyelid itself. In the case of the lower lid, one must take into account the excess skin and fat, eyelid laxity, fluid retention, and midface droop. If the patient is more concerned with wrinkles, fine lines, and irregularities in skin pigmentation, they would be better served by cosmetic Botox®, dermal fillers, or a laser. Failure to properly identify and address the root of the patients concern will lead to unsatisfactory results.

Even with the best surgical results, some patients are disappointed. Therefore, it is important to understand the benefits and limitations of eyelid surgery. A realistic goal for a patient is to make their eyes to look “less tired”, “more open”, or “less baggy”. Patients can look better for their age, but not necessarily younger. Surgery, no matter how aggressive, will not dramatically improve appearances or lives. Changes should be subtle. Good cosmetic surgery does not draw attention to itself; it blends into the background, the same as good makeup or a good haircut.

The ideal patient has a well defined idea of one or two things they would like to improve. The ideal surgeon should be able to offer one, or two procedures to make the patients concerns better. Too often, people get stuck in the trap: “If I change this area, then I must do something with that area.” Another common mistake is the desire to make things “perfect.” I would argue that it is always better to move forward in small steps, and avoid drastic changes.

This idea of “not doing too much”

is even more important around the eyelids as they serve the critical function of protecting and lubricating one’s eyes. As an oculoplastic surgeon, part of my practice revolves around fixing eyelids that have been damaged by either trauma or surgery. Poorly functioning eyelids are the most common serious complication of periocular surgery. This can be seen with an overly aggressive surgeon, who “takes too much.” It can also be seen with some of the older techniques for lower eyelid blepharoplasty which create a “pulled down” appearance to the lower lid. In either case, the patient experiences dryness, pain, and blurred vision. Additional surgery may be required to fix the eyelid.

Fortunately with good surgical planning and technique, and a patient with focused and realistic goals, the outcome of cosmetic periocular surgery is usually excellent. After a few days, patients can return to all of their normal activities. Bruising and swelling take approximately one-to-two weeks to resolve. Most patients are extremely pleased, and it is not uncommon to see their spouses, siblings, and friends come to the office for evaluations as well. This perhaps is the best compliment a surgeon can receive on his or her work.

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