There may come a point when you look in the mirror and ask yourself, “Is it time for a facelift?” Facial aging is inevitable, but when the changes that you see start to bother you—think sagging skin, looseness in your neck and a poorly defined jawline—you may want to consider a facelift, the only option that will provide you with long-lasting improvement.

What to know before you have surgery

01 Your expectations need to be realistic. Just because you’re opting to undergo surgery doesn’t mean you’ll look like you’re 20 years old again. “The goal is to make the face look refreshed and younger, and fit in better,” says Dallas plastic surgeon Fritz E. Barton, Jr., MD. Keep in mind that a facelift can’t always eliminate every line and wrinkle.

02 You will have scars. While techniques have improved over the years, a facelift still leaves scarring. New York facial plastic surgeon Andrew A. Jacono, MD, says, “The incisions are hidden—it’s the subunit of the hair, running inside the ear canal and behind the earlobe without running into the scalp.” In most patients, scars improve over time and blend in.

03 There is some downtime. It can take anywhere from 10 days to a couple of weeks before you are ready to resume normal activities for the first time, and upward of a few months for all of the swelling to fully go down.

04 Know what can and cannot be fixed. Your plastic surgeon should explain to you what concerns can be addressed with a facelift alone. Orlando, FL, plastic surgeon Armando Soto, MD, says the surgery will restore a youthful shape to your face but it will not improve the look of brown spots, fine lines or the position or shape of your eyelids and eyebrows.

Do you need a facelift?

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How the shape of your face affects aging

If your face is round... the cheeks and lower face may sag. A lower facelift, which targets the lower part of the face, is the best option. The cheeks can be resculpted by injecting fat and/or fillers.

If your face is oval... hollowing in the temples and cheeks is common because of extra fat in the cheeks, which diminishes over time. Fillers and/or fat fill in hollowing, or a mid-facelift helps with sagging.

If your face is square... loose skin and sagging jowls on the lower part of the face tend to be the biggest problems. A traditional facelift is likely the most effective solution as it addresses jowling and lax skin.

If your face is heart-shaped... the forehead and upper eyes are most affected. “Heart-shaped faces often have high cheekbones and tend to age slower than square faces with flat cheekbones,” explains Dr. Jacono. “The skeletal structure supports the face for less drooping.”

Should you have surgery at an early age?

La Jolla, CA, plastic surgeon Robert Singer, MD, says there is a trend with younger patients undergoing facelifts, and data shows that having surgery in your 40s or early 50s leads to better, longer-lasting results. “It allows patients to reap the benefit of looking fresher and younger from the improvement of surgery now rather than when they have aged greater later on in life.” Opting for a facelift at a younger age doesn’t mean you can forgo all other anti-aging measures. “There is still a place for fillers and injectables for these patients. Maintenance and good skin care are important, too,” says Dr. Singer.