

DEEP-PLANE INVASION

Plastic surgeon **Dr Wong Chin Ho** did his fellowship in facelifting, and lifts a lot of faces – who better to answer my questions? As it happens, he’s just done a great job of removing three small growths from my face (the legacy of sun damage in my foolish youth), so I’ve had personal experience of his incredibly fine stitching technique.

How would you describe your approach?

WCH: The decision to have a facelift might be one of the most significant decisions that you will make, and many patients instinctively know when the time has come for them.

I like to put things into perspective and to be clear about what is possible in terms of the degree of improvement that can be achieved, given his or her individual skin quality, skeletal structure and the severity of ageing-related changes.

Very good results can be achieved for Caucasian skin: it’s lighter, thinner and more delicate than Asian skin, so we can drape it more effectively. And when the correct technique is applied, facelifts can also be profoundly beneficial for Asians.

“The main purpose of this surgery is not to please the eye, but to uplift the soul

– Dr Wong Chin Ho

Who is a good candidate for a facelift?

WCH: Someone who is looking for a profound rejuvenation. But if you’re not keen on surgery and will be satisfied with a very subtle result, non-invasive techniques like Thermage and Ulthera can tighten and rejuvenate the skin to some extent.

Non-invasive methods don’t work for the jowls, as you can see by manually lifting your own cheeks: there’s excess skin above it, and that needs to be removed.

To remove sagging jowls and really get a fresh appearance, however, takes a surgical facelift. Ageing is not just a question of sagging, either; there’s also an issue of facial shape. The youthful shape is triangular or heart-shaped; now, with jowls appearing, it becomes square-ish.

What sort of facelift do you perform?

WCH: I do what is called a **deep-plane or composite facelift**, which addresses both the skin layer and the layer below it. From my pictures, you can see that it gives a completely

natural result – these women simply look like their younger selves.

Because the tightening is done in the support layer of the skin, rather than in the skin itself, we avoid the stigmata of a traditional facelift – that wind-tunnel look. Now, with our better understanding of the anatomy of the face, we are able to achieve much better results.

Who developed the deep-plane facelift?

WCH: The deep-plane facelift was first described over 20 years ago by Dr Sam Hamra in Dallas, who achieved superb results. In those days, however, the technique was not popular, because it was considered dangerous: it works at the deeper plane where you find the facial nerves, so there’s a real risk of nerve injury.



The pioneer in the understanding of facial anatomy, who is also my mentor, is Dr Brian Mendelsohn from Melbourne, Australia. Together, he and I contributed a chapter on Facial Soft Tissue Spaces for the third edition of Neligan’s important *Plastic Surgery Principles*.

With this understanding, we can get into those facial spaces safely with minimal risk to the patient. The risk of nerve injury associated with the new, improved composite technique is the same as it is with other facelift techniques: one to two percent. The result is more natural and the effect is more long-lasting.

In my experience, it has been a real advance for Asian patients, who tend to have thicker, heavier skin that the traditional facelift is less effective in lifting

To the point: What would you recommend for me?

WCH: You look very good for your age, and you’re lucky to have hardly any eye bags. You have a great skeletal structure and a good jawline and cheekbones, so you would achieve a great result with the composite facelift. I would recommend the full facelift – and for you, we could use the short scar technique.

Another component of ageing is deflation; to restore volume around the eyes and the forehead, I would harvest

some fat from elsewhere on the body, and graft it into the sunken areas to revolumise them. This “lift and fill” approach is the essence of the modern facelift.

When is the right time to have a facelift?

WCH: If you have it done while your skin is still in good condition – before you obviously *need* a lift – you will achieve the best results. Once ageing is advanced, it’s more difficult to get a great outcome.

Only the patient knows when the time is right. Often, her decision is triggered by a life event such as a daughter getting married, or perhaps the death of a spouse. I always say that the main purpose of this surgery is not to please the eye, but to uplift the soul.

Deep-Plane Facelift

Cost: From \$20,000 to \$28,000

Downtime: About two weeks

Duration of effect: Lasting