

## LIPS

## TO FILL OR NOT TO FILL?

*One of the most common procedures is also the most complicated.  
Tatiana Boncompagni weighs the pros and cons of plumping your pout.*

“WHO DID YOUR LIPS?” is not a compliment. Because if someone can tell you’ve plumped your pout, that’s a sure sign it wasn’t done well. “If lips aren’t injected perfectly, it’s obvious,” says Marina Peredo, M.D., a New York dermatologist. Nevertheless it’s a risk that more women are willing to take, especially since the procedure is temporary (hyaluronic acid injections last between six months and a year, at about \$800–\$2,000 per treatment). Thinking about going bigger? Here’s what you need to know.

**WHY PEOPLE FILL** “As we age, lips naturally lose volume,” says Oren Tepper, M.D., a plastic surgeon and director of aesthetic surgery at Montefiore Health System in New York. If that’s a concern, the time to schedule a doctor’s appointment is “when you’ve essentially lost the definition between your lip and the skin above or below it,” says Steven Levine, M.D., a plastic surgeon in New York. In these situations, fillers are most doctors’ go-to as they can quickly restore lips to their original size and shape. As for which filler to choose, there’s a plethora of FDA-approved hyaluronic acids that can provide either structural support (like Juvéderm Ultra XC) or a subtle hydrated effect, “like you have lip gloss on” (such as Restylane Silk), says Peredo. Discuss which one is right for you with your doctor, based on your ultimate lip goals. The beauty of hyaluronic acid? It’s biocompatible, dissolves over the course of a year, and has been shown to stimulate the production of your own natural collagen. Also, it’s easily erased with hyaluronidase, an enzyme that quickly degrades filler if things go awry. To keep that from happening and achieve the most believable outcome, Peredo has patients book two or three appointments over two weeks so that she can build volume gradually and ensure symmetry.



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**WHY PEOPLE HESITATE** Fear of lips looking fake, bruising, and safety concerns are all reasons patients are nervous about getting lip filler, says Tina Alster, a Washington, D.C.,-based dermatologist. To avoid an unnatural look, ask for a consultation to make sure your aesthetic goals are aligned with your doctor’s work (patient before-and-afters are great for this). You want to see balance: “The upper lip should be one-third and the bottom lip two-thirds of the total size of the mouth,” Peredo says. “Also, your top lip should never project over the bottom.” After the injections, your lips will likely swell by up to 25 percent, so schedule your appointment at least three days before a big event (ideally longer). Bruising is common, even if you stay away from blood thinners (such as ibuprofen and aspirin) and alcohol the week before the treatment. While rare, practitioners can accidentally inject filler into a blood vessel, leading to serious injury, notes Alster. “It’s important that your practitioner understands anatomy so he or she can recognize and treat potential complications,” she says.

**A NEW ALTERNATIVE** While injections can add volume, they can’t shorten the length between your nose and upper lip, which becomes more drawn with age. For that, there is a more permanent solution. Enter the surgical lip-lift. In this procedure, a surgeon reduces the distance between the nose and top lip by removing a sliver of skin and tissue directly underneath the nose. The 30-minute procedure, which costs \$3,000–\$4,000, can slightly “flip” the lip upward, so more of the pink part is visible. The results should last for more than 15 years. As you ponder your options, consider this: Research shows that smiling can make you look younger too. ■