

Facial Implants –

Your face is your fortune. **Chen Li Li** talks to Dr. Woffles Wu to find out how implants can help if the shape of your face leaves much to be desired.



Singaporean plastic surgeon Dr. Woffles Wu. Wu remarks on the trend of chin implants, where you can see the more extreme results in patients.

I may be top-sided, 'hollow' in certain areas, or irregularly shaped. Whatever it is, you don't have to be a facial expert about expert to know the importance of having a well-contoured face with balanced features, and the effort it can have on your overall appearance.

The Asian stereotypes for those with 'underbitten' features go way back to medieval times – people with receding chins were considered to be unattractive and undesirable, those with no chinbones appeared perpetually sad and tired, while those with narrow cheeks were considered untrustworthy. Individuals with asymmetrical features, where features on either side of their face were not balanced, were simply deemed less attractive.

Regardless of what era we are in, feeling unattractive usually leads to one thing – lowered self-esteem and a lack of self-confidence. However, all is not lost. There is light at the end of the tunnel, as these imperfections can be easily corrected with facial implants.

WHAT ARE IMPLANTS?

Say implants and many will instinctively think of breast implants. However, what many do not realise is that facial implants also exist and are frequently used

in cosmetic surgery. When used to correct or enhance a feature of the face, facial implants can offer a remarkable change to how one looks.

Facial implants are essentially used to change the contour of the face without having to cut any bones," explains Singaporean plastic surgeon, Dr. Woffles Wu. The main purpose of implants is to expand the volume of the face, provide support to the overlying soft tissue and to create new contours to the facial shape. The most common parts of the face where implants are used are the cheekbones, temples, nose, forehead, nasal alar lines, jawline and chin.

Dr. Wu says, "My favourites are the cheek and chin implants, where you can see the most dramatic results in patients. The improved facial structure can change a person's whole perception of himself when the sees a more attractive reflection in the mirror."

So what are these little face-altering wonders made out of? Implants can be made of solid medical grade silicone, a bone substitute known as hydroxyapatite (HA), or the patient's own body fat or cartilage. Silicone implants come in pre-moulded shapes, which can be fitted into the part of the face that requires volume enhancement. The use of the patient's own body fat or cartilage involves a separate surgery

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Filling in The Blanks

to harvest the fat or cartilage and therefore appears to a different category of patients, explains Dr. Wu.

Hydroxyapatite, a naturally occurring product derived from coral, is fast gaining in popularity as an implant material because it allows precise shaping to meet a patient's requirement and allows bone to grow.

The use of each implant type has its own pros and cons. But which one is right for you will depend on what you're ideally setting out to improve and achieve, and is best discussed with your plastic surgeon.

WHY IMPLANTS?

Traditionally, synthetic injectable fillers were used in facial contouring, providing exactly the same results as implants. However, most fillers are not permanent and will dissolve over time, requiring patients to return for continuous treatments to maintain the desired effect, something many do not enjoy.

Moreover, a patient who needs to fill up larger facial areas such as the hollows of the cheeks, may need large amounts of the filler, which can be very costly.

Fillers are also less regulated by the Ministry of Health generally, and can consist of compounds that do not meet safety requirements. Some injectable fillers can even produce devastating outcomes such as allergic reactions, which are known to form lumps with painful disfiguring results.

"The nose, chin, jawline, cheeks and edge of the eye socket have the best results with implants," says Dr. Wu. He adds, "The implants can be inserted as an individual procedure or in conjunction with another procedure such as a facelift."

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

As with any medical or cosmetic procedure, surgical insertion of facial implants can not be a risk of infection, however, prescribing a course of antibiotics after your procedure usually helps with this problem. "The implant may also shift from its original position or become distorted," cautions Dr. Wu.

Immediately after the procedure, there is also a risk of developing a seroma, which is a pocket of clear fluid that may take a few weeks to clear and needs to be drained by your doctor.

Still, Dr. Wu assures that the risks are relatively low in the hands of trained plastic surgeons. "This is why patient selection is a crucial aspect of treatment. We will first counsel the patient on what to expect, describe the risks and ask them if they are willing to come back for follow-up treatment in the case of complications," he stresses.

Choosing a good surgeon is equally important for patients. Dr. Wu advises patients not to be shy to request for examples of previous jobs and seek a second or third opinion before deciding on a surgeon.

Experienced doctors usually have a wide

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portfolio of before and after cases, says Dr. Wu, yet word of mouth is still useful to know if the majority of the cases have been successful. Be wary if all the doctor can show you are brochures of the procedures.

WHAT TO EXPECT

Although facial implants are suitable for most people, it would be advisable to inform your doctor if you smoke, are on any medications or have problems such as gum disease, as these factors can affect the outcome of your surgery, and also increase surgical risks during your procedure. Your doctor will be able to give you appropriate advice on what to avoid, what your pre-surgery protocol should involve, and after-care tips.

The procedure usually takes about 20 to 40 minutes to complete and no hospitalisation is

required. Recovery usually takes about a week, and one should expect swelling and pain at the implanted sites. "Rigorous" surgeries, such as that for the jawline, may have a longer recovery time of three weeks.

The effects of the implant won't be apparent immediately, and you will need to stay away from rough activities that can injure your face.

The price range of the procedure varies from surgeon to surgeon, depending on the kind of implant used and the procedure. HA implants can be more costly, but they are biologically more stable and have a better long-term effect.

"The best thing about implants is that they can be removed and re-inserted in the case of complications. You can't do that with silicone fillers once they have been injected," Dr. Wu concludes. **BY**

Top Implant Sites

CHIN
A tiny incision is created inside the mouth or in the skin just below the chin area to create a pocket over the front of the chin bone (where the implant is to be placed). Sutures will be removed in a week. Dissolvable sutures are used for intra-oral pockets.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:
Blue-black marks will be visible for a week. You will have temporary problems with eating, talking and smiling. Inform your doctor if you are a smoker or have oral problems.

CHEEK
Frequently done together with other cosmetic procedures such as a facelift, forehead lift or eyelid surgery, if done independently, a tiny incision is made on the upper gums or lower eyelid to form a pocket for the implant. A dressing will be applied to minimise discomfort and swelling.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:
There may be dietary restrictions after the procedure, which are temporary. You may have difficulty moving your mouth and lips the first two weeks following the procedure.

JAWLINE
Incisions are created on either side of the lower lip to create a pocket for the implant. Sutures, which dissolve in about 10 days, are used to close the incisions.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:
There may be significant swelling the day after the procedure, with mild swelling persisting for a few months after. You may have difficulties talking, smiling, eating and moving your mouth for a few weeks after the procedure.

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