



Plastic fantastic?

Lifts and tucks are more popular than ever, but how far would you go? Your bottom, chin, face and tummy need never be the same again...

She's no stranger to the scalpel, and, in truth, is the least likely candidate to be hailed for her beauty efforts (note the slapdash online make-up tutorial earlier this year). So when pictures emerged recently of bad gal rocker Courtney Love, 47, looking breathtakingly youthful — smooth of skin and plump of cheek — talk turned to the stem-cell facelift, an innovative procedure credited with transforming the rock'n'roll bad gal's partied-out looks.

So how does the facelift work? "It uses a person's own fat and adult stem cells to rejuvenate and plump their face," says Dr Sam Rizk, the New York surgeon who performed the procedure on Love. "New PureGraft technology allows us to separate adult stem cells and fat, before injecting each into the face in different layers. Unlike a traditional facelift, which seeks to lift loose jowls and skin on the neck, this procedure addresses volume, collagen production and even discoloration in the skin."

The tide is turning against obvious plastic surgery — the pinched nose and overinflated cheeks, once a sign of work done well, are no longer considered desirable or attractive. "The new trend is for the natural look," says Dr Ayham Al-Ayoubi, medical director at the London Medical & Aesthetic Clinic.

"Now that we can all spot rhinoplasty from afar, your eye automatically assumes she has had everything done because she looks artificial. Now the desire is for any work to appear totally natural, invisible even."

So could the understated effects of the stem-cell facelift be the definitive vehicle for turning back the clock? Rizk is optimistic. "It's a significant breakthrough in our understanding of ageing, probably the biggest to date. Stem cells hold the future for anti-ageing — although we don't fully understand their mechanisms yet, we can see the beneficial effects."

Still in its infancy, the procedure carries with it a serious risk.

"There is no official clinical study into the stem-cell facelift," Al-Ayoubi warns. "I'm reluctant to perform any procedure where I don't have 100% control. If there is a reaction, there is no way back."

Indeed, just how perilous such procedures can be became apparent when the National Confidential Enquiry into Patient Outcome and Death recently published a report that found, shockingly, that more than half of those offering complex surgeries, such as breast reduction, perform these operations fewer than 10 times a year. Nigel Mercer, president of the British Association of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons (Baaps) says: "There is an absolute need for statutory regulation in this sector. Aesthetic surgery needs to be recognised as the multi-million-pound speciality it is and not just a fragmented cottage industry. Your cosmetic practitioner should be a fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons, and have further specialised studies in plastic surgery. Check that they are on the General Medical Council specialist register, and a BAAPS member."

For all the cowboys out there, though, there are surgeons who can be trusted.

And with them, they bring some promising new procedures that not only aim to deliver results, but do so with a minimum of pain and recovery time. Make sure you're with the good guys.

CHIN IMPLANT

The current Hollywood obsession, this procedure elicits the most "Has she, hasn't she?" comments, directed towards, among others, Megan Fox, Chelsea Clinton and Lindsay Lohan. Despite its relative subtlety (a good chin job will go unnoticed), it can completely transform the dimensions of the face to create a more classically attractive appearance. "I've seen a 25% increase in demand for chin implants recently," Al-Ayoubi says, "mainly because there is a new, less invasive procedure that involves inserting a small, manufactured silastic product into the chin. The previous implant used cartilage taken from the patient, but it was a big procedure with a long recovery time." The consultant plastic surgeon Lucian Ion agrees. "I'm very much in favour of chin implants, but I don't use silicone ones. There is a fair amount of evidence that they erode the bone underneath."

Al-Ayoubi says there is a growing tendency to use dermal filler to inject into the chin. "I use hyaluronic acid, which is already present in the body, so reduces the risk of reaction — you can inject large quantities safely. The statistics show that 70% of chin patients are going with fillers now. Only those with a severely retracted chin bone were opting for the implant."

