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What To Expect From Buccal Fat Removal, According To A Plastic Surgeon



While electing to undergo a cosmetic procedure was once something people tried to be hush-hush about, the stigma surrounding plastic surgery seems to have dissipated in recent years. Psychology Today suggests that the influence of social media has played a key role in this societal pivot — not only by driving more people towards plastic surgery, but also by countering feelings of fear and shame with education and exposure.

Much like the concept of swapping out bell bottoms for skinny jeans, deciding what you want to nip and tuck often comes down to following what's on trend. And one procedure that may be flooding your feed right now is buccal fat removal — the surgical removal of the pad of fat between the cheekbone and the jawbone (per Cleveland Clinic).

In an exclusive interview with Health Digest, Dr. Michael Horn — a Board Certified Chicago, Illinois plastic Surgeon — gives us the skinny on the buccal fat removal procedure that's taken social media by storm.

What's achieved through this procedure

If you too have drooled over the dreamy cheekbones of Johnny Depp's famous character Edward ScissorHands, you understand the allure of highlighting one's bone structure. **"The purpose of removing buccal fat is to slim the cheeks and surgically target the area of the cheek hollows,"** explains Dr. Horn. **"Even though a full and soft face is associated with youth, some people find that if this area is too full it gives off a chubby appearance."**

Dr. Horn points out that everyone has buccal fat pads in the hollows of their cheeks, but some people have naturally bigger ones. The New York Times explains that it's just a matter of facial structure, and what you're born with is what you've got — unless you schedule an appointment with someone like Dr. Horn. People with larger buccal fat pads are most often the ones looking to have buccal fat removal. Dr. Horn says that it would be just as unlikely for someone

with a "gaunt" face to seek out the procedure as it would be for a surgeon to agree to do it, noting that, "doing so would make them look more 'caved in' as they age."

Why is it so popular all of the sudden?

The popularity of buccal fat removal is a fairly new phenomenon, says Dr. Horn. "According to data from Google Trends, searches for buccal fat removal shot up dramatically starting around December 11." He pointed out that model and entrepreneur, Chrissy Teigan, announced she had the procedure done late last year, and there's since been speculation that many of her celebrity peers have followed suit.

"This procedure can make the cheekbones look more pronounced by removing the buccal fat beneath them to create a slimmer and sleeker-looking face," says Dr. Horn, pointing out a major reason why the procedure is so coveted. "Older patients might seek the procedure because the buccal fat pad can droop and is subject to gravity, resulting in a heavier and jowly lower face." At the end of the day, though, Dr. Horn says it's all about what's 'in' at the moment. "Just as with fashion, certain plastic surgery procedures become au courant—like BBL's," he says, referring to the Brazilian butt lift craze that swept the globe a few years back. "[Trends are] typically fueled by [social media/celebrity hype in this age]."

Risks involved in buccal fat removal

No procedure is without its risks, and Dr. Horn asserts that buccal fat removal is no different. Because facial volume in the treated area is removed, he says, "It can prematurely age some patients by having a hollowing effect. It looks flattering when performed on a younger person with abundant facial volume. As that patient ages, they could risk looking gaunt in that area."

And once that buccal fat is gone, Dr. Horn says there's no getting it back. If later you decide you want that volume back in your face, he says you can only achieve that look with the use of cosmetic fillers. "Those contemplating buccal fat removal should consider the risks and understand how their results might change over time. If a patient loses a significant amount of weight post buccal fat removal, or as they age, there is a chance that they could look more hollow than they would like."

"In terms of safety, a skilled plastic surgeon also knows that ducts and nerves are enmeshed with the buccal fat, so the surgeon has to be cautious not to damage them," says Dr. Horn. He notes that some of the more rare side effects of the surgery include facial nerve damage, salivary gland damage, deep vein thrombosis, excess fat removal and facial asymmetry.

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