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PHOTOGRAPHY BY GERIN CHOINIÈRE

# Skin Deep

## Tone and Tighten with Minimal Downtime



What happens when the same face that's been staring back at you in the mirror your whole life suddenly sags? It seems to happen overnight. In reality, over time the collagen slowly slips away, the sun's damaging rays rear their nasty brown spots, and fine lines deepen and multiply.

Deciding what to do about aging skin and a changing complexion is anything but simple in today's complex marketplace. From laser resurfacing to mini-facelifts, where's a girl to begin? And more importantly, how do you go about choosing the right treatment and the proper plastic surgeon to rejuvenate your youthful look? Pull up a pedicure chair, and hear what the top docs in Charlotte have to say about what's hot and what's not.

### LESS IS MORE

According to Dr. Kevin Smith, M.D., F.A.C.S., a veteran with Charlotte Plastic Surgery, plastic surgery has now evolved into a maintenance field. "People today are having smaller procedures, more often—each with less downtime," said Smith. "What was once a facelift at age 60, is now spread out over a span of 30 years, starting with facial rejuvenation, then maybe a brow lift or an eye lift, and then finally a face lift."

Consider that your skin metabolism, where skin cells get fewer in number and flatter in contour, drops 10 percent every 10 years. People today are smarter about the health of their skin and their bodies as well as educated about options to correct flaws. This, coupled with the fact that minor procedures wallop major results and are less invasive, only makes it more appealing to "have a little work done."

Dr. Robert Graper, M.D., F.A.C.S., founder of Graper Cosmetic Surgery, agrees that procedures like skin resurfacing and injectables are so popular because of the diminished downtime—less time off and away from the social scene.

Graper says when he consults with a patient and understands what they are trying to achieve, their desired amount of downtime will factor into the recommended procedure. "If they are o.k. with downtime, we might put them to sleep and do a chemical peel which will totally remove wrinkles and brown spots," he says. This type of procedure takes between three and five days of recovery. If a person cannot afford to take that much time off, a laser can achieve a similar result over time.

### WHAT'S HOT . . .

"No question," says Dr. Graper, "that the biggest thing in skin care is laser resurfacing with less downtime."

Aside from major re-sculpting procedures, like breast augmentation and liposuction, there is an arsenal of tools to quickly and easily soften the effects of aging. Here are the hottest treatments, according to Drs. Smith and Graper, to perk your pretty primp:

### RESURFACING

Fractional CO2 lasers: Wavelengths vary among lasers, CO2 being the highest. A high energy beam of laser light is used to put energy

below the skin to ablate tissue, eliminate brown spots and smooth out wrinkles and scars. Only a fraction of the skin's surface is treated (in a polka dot pattern), leaving "bridges" of untouched skin to speed the healing. It involves a single treatment and can vary in degrees of intensity depending on the need.

"Ten years ago, the lasers we were using caused 3-7 weeks of social downtime," said Dr. Smith. "Today's technology results in only 3-7 days of downtime."

Prior to any procedure, both Smith and Graper begin with a consultation to assess the patient's goals and determine the best procedure to achieve results.

Practice a healthy skin care regimen.

Skin loses one percent of its collagen every year.

Antioxidants stop the breakdown.

Peels: Retin-A and Glycolic Acid Peels remove fine lines, improve color and soften skin. It's a tamer version of laser skin resurfacing, since it barely penetrates the dermis, but popular and cost-effective.



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Injectables: Injectables and dermal fillers aren't for everyone, but they do offer immediate results. Dr. Smith likens it to replacing the carpet pad under your skin, when the carpet (skin) thins and the pad goes away. The injectables serve to replace the carpet pad. It's so hot in Charlotte that Dr. Graper attributes a 30 percent growth in the past three years to this area of his practice.

Botox® helps with dynamic wrinkles by temporarily weakening the muscle, taking tension away from the skin. Relaxin® is a new name on the market to look for, achieving the same effect.

Fillers: The type of filler is determined by the area that is being treated as well as the lasting effect and cost. Fillers

are used to plump soft tissue to camouflage elasticity.

Juvéderm™ is a smooth consistency gel made of hyaluronic acid—a naturally occurring substance in your skin that helps to add volume and hydration. It fills in areas where age has left tissue deflated, primarily used before a patient is ready for a traditional face or eyelift, according to Dr. Graper.

Restylane® uses natural building blocks in the body as tissue plumpers, commonly used in the lips.

Radiesse®, a calcium-based product made of tiny bone beads suspended in a water-based gel, is also great for filling smiles lines with longer lasting results (12-18 months) because the body takes longer to absorb calcium. In addition, it can stimulate the body to generate its own collagen.

Sculptra™, originally used in trials for HIV patients with severe collagen loss, is now approved for general use and offer lasting results for up to four years.

Mini-facelifts: As the term implies, mini facelifts offer mini results. It is, however, a minimally invasive procedure that's gained popularity due to the decreased downtime. Small incisions in front of the ears are used to tighten the skin. "You can't rely on your skin to all of a sudden be firm," said Dr. Smith. "This is only for people who need minimal improvement."

### WHAT'S NOT

Looking younger is a billion dollar business—in a buyer beware market. Radio and print ads clutter the media with promises. Before you waste precious dollars and time, do your homework and make sure that if you're having

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surgery, a Board Certified Plastic Surgeon is doing the work. A plastic surgeon is more tilted toward general surgery, so, for example, if you're having liposuction—you don't want to use a board certified dermatologist.

There are also fictional boards, not recognized by the American Board of Medical Specialties, that offer certification. You can, and should, visit [www.abms.org](http://www.abms.org) to check credentials.

Also make sure you're not falling for marketing gimmicks or treatments that over promise and under deliver. For example, Dr. Graper claims that Thermage, which uses radiofrequency to tighten the skin, is a technique "not worth anything. People who are not established and are trying to gain market share are putting spin on common or outdated procedures or are selling techniques that don't offer results," said Graper. "We don't do a lot of new procedures at Graper Cosmetic Surgery—we don't want to lose our credibility."

Dr. Smith takes pride in the natural, rested look he offers clients through his work. "We like to think you've seen our [Charlotte Plastic Surgery's] best work and don't know it."

What makes plastic surgery and rejuvenating procedures so popular and accepted today? "Twenty years ago people were more concerned about who was going to find out," said Dr. Graper. "Now it's like the BMW in your driveway."

**TIPS FOR PREVENTATIVE MAINTENANCE**

Charlotte is a young, healthy, wealthy town—with plenty of sun damage mixed with a dose of disposable income. Procedures are easier, and techniques for looking younger are better and more plentiful than ever. But if you follow these steps you can help fend off fine lines and prevent unnecessary skin damage.

Summer is here. Avoid the sun or wear hat, sunglasses and sunscreen. "An SPF-15 that blocks UVA/UVB rays is fine and will allow you to stay in the sun 15 times longer," says Dr. Graper.

Don't smoke. Smoking a cigarette drops the oxygen content in your body 40 percent for 6 hours (not to mention the perma-pucker you're stuck wearing).

**MAINTAIN HEALTHY HYDRATION**

Apply topical Vitamin C as recommended by a licensed aesthetician. According to Dr. Smith, only 10 percent of an orally absorbed Vitamin C pill gets into the skin.

Practice a healthy skin care regimen. Skin loses one percent of its collagen every year. Antioxidants stop the breakdown.

**BODY SCULPTING**

Did you know that more middle class workers than millionaires go under the knife for a nip or tuck, according to a 2005 American Society of Plastic Surgeons (most recent study to date). Body contouring, from abdominoplasty ("tummy tuck") to a thigh lift, is on the lips of many—confirmed by the fact that liposuction leads the way as the most popular plastic surgery procedure in the country.

While traditional liposuction, introduced in 1978, remains the gold standard, there are procedures like Ultrasonic-assisted Liposuction and SmartLipo™. For areas of the body that do not respond to diet and exercise, liposuction improves body shape by removing excessive fat deposits. According to Dr. Graper, the most common areas treated for women include the abdomen, inner and outer thighs and hips. For men, chest and love handles are areas of concentration.

In traditional liposuction, targeted fat cells are infused with a solution and then the fat is vacuumed out with a specially designed tube.

With Ultrasonic-assisted Liposuction, larger incisions are made to introduce the ultrasonic probe under the skin to emulsify the fat before it is suctioned out. "This technique works well in areas of fibrous fat, such as the upper abdomen and flanks where traditional lipo might not be as effective," said Dr. Graper.

For many established plastic surgeons, SmartLipo, an alternative to liposuction, is a new phenomenon and falls under the category of buyer beware. According to Dr. Graper, SmartLipo is a gimmick that uses a laser to energize a crystal tip to create an ultrasonic shock wave to again melt the fat before it is suctioned out.

"Traditional suction works just fine for most people. The rest is hype and will not replace the traditional technique because the cost is higher and the complications greater," said Graper.

The ideal patient to undergo liposuction is within 10 to 15 pounds of their ideal body weight, with isolated areas of fat resistant to diet and exercise. "Patients should also have good skin tone and realistic expectations," said Dr. Graper. While improvements are immediate, final results take shape in about 2 to 3 months.

For more information contact:

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