

The Eyes Have It - Would YOU sacrifice your vision for beauty?

Skin treatment around the eyes requires a delicate and experienced hand, because the face, eyelids, tear drainage system, surface of the eye and cornea all work together. Dr Peter Ring at Eye Institute in Auckland warns that people seeking to look younger might end up with vision problems.

"Many people just don't know that any surgical procedure on or around the eye has an effect on the whole functional unit of eye and eyelid," says Dr Ring. "Thus, it is critical that procedures on this part of the face, whether functional or aesthetic, be performed by ophthalmic and oculoplastic surgeons who have relevant training and experience."

Modern ophthalmic and oculoplastic surgery now incorporates Botox® and filler injections around the eyes. Botox diminishes dynamic lines (caused by muscle action) and fillers diminish static lines and furrows (present at rest). These appearance techniques are important additions to surgical practice, because they give surgeons alternatives to removing skin or lifting tissue in order to treat lines, wrinkles, creases or furrows.

Oculoplastic surgeons like Doctor Adam Watson and Eye Surgeon Doctor Helen Danesh-Meyer also from Eye Institute, now use Botox and fillers to achieve more subtle and reversible effects than could be achieved with traditional surgical practices. They report that clients appreciate the short recovery time and the fact that their "new look" can be achieved without scars.

Men and women aged 30 and over have received oculoplastic treatment at Eye Institute. They have sought to have droopy eyelids fixed and "bags" removed from under their eyes. Both

droopy eyelids (ptosis) and "bags" (fullness and sagging of the eyelid skin) are cosmetic concerns that create an appearance of constant tiredness but can also cause vision problems. Other clients who have taken advantage of Eye Institute's blade-free IntraLase Custom LASIK procedure to restore 20/20 vision have also often wanted a complete fresh look. All of these day surgical procedures can be performed or augmented with Botox and filler injections.

Dr Watson says, "A lot of people put up with cosmetic and vision problems when they don't have to. Conditions like these can be very successfully treated, with significant appearance, health and lifestyle benefits."

Oculoplastic surgery and what to look for in a surgeon

1. Oculoplastic surgery is cosmetic, corrective, and reconstructive eye surgery.
2. Also called oculo-facial surgery, as eyelids are continuous with the forehead and cheeks.
3. It manages and repairs problems primarily related to the tissues or structures surrounding the eye, including eyelids, tear ducts, and orbit.
4. Surgery is primarily done to maintain, restore or improve function and appearance.
5. Oculoplastic surgeons also do aesthetic treatments on normal eyelids and surrounding tissues to improve their perceived beauty.
6. Oculoplastic surgeons are ophthalmologists (eye surgeons) who have completed several years of additional, highly specialised training in plastic surgery. They therefore have an in-depth knowledge of the eyelids, the eye and their function.

Shedding light on lasers

Dr Kevin McKerrow, a dermatologist at the Skin Specialist Centre, remembers when he first used lasers 20 odd years ago.

"They were huge, as big as my desk, and used mainly for vascular conditions like port-wine birthmarks.

"You could get good results but they had some pretty unacceptable side effects, like a high rate of scarring and, I've got to say, the plume they created was pretty unpleasant.

"They were ablative lasers, which literally means they burnt the skin, so there was an odour and lots of smoke. You needed a smoke evacuator to get rid of the smoke."

In the last two decades, laser technology has advanced rapidly. Dr McKerrow happily reports that there are far fewer side effects and a greater range of skin issues which can be treated with the new generation of non-ablative lasers.

Laser stands for Light Amplification by the Stimulated Emission of Radiation. In short, lasers produce specific wavelengths of light and this light, visible and infrared, is absorbed by the skin.

Using a laser, specific cells can be targeted to remove, for example, unwanted pigmentation, acne scars, wrinkles and fine lines, and/or hair.

Dr McKerrow says laser operators have to know what specific wavelength is suitable for which treatment.

But all lasers are not created equal.

Dr McKerrow says those contemplating laser treatment need to ask questions about the qualifications and experience the laser operator has, what type of laser will be used and why, the type of results they might expect and, equally, about side effects.

"We've got seven different lasers at the Skin Specialist Centre because each one is best suited for a specific treatment."

He says side-effects have been minimised by the specificity of the wavelength, but one must be careful and judge each individual case on its presentation. If this is not done, it can lead to untoward side-effects such as pigment changes - brown and white marks, which may be permanent - and scarring.