

It's All About The *eyes*

Still the most requested plastic surgery procedures in Asia, surgery around the eye area can make a big difference to whether you look alert or sleepy, young or old.

Mariel Chow speaks to the doctors who tell us how it's done.

Some believe the eyes are the first thing the opposite sex notices when choosing a mate. It was Shakespeare who said that the eyes are the window to the soul. If so, then shouldn't we want to possess big, beautiful eyes that are free from eye bags or dark circles? Although some believe that classic Chinese monolids are unique and pretty, the foreign media we are most frequently exposed to portrays beauty as including large eyes with deep creases or double lids. Eye bags are also deemed unattractive as they make people appear older and tired. With hectic daily schedules, time for rest and recuperation tends to be cut short. This not only affects the skin but, of course, the eyes, which end up with unappealing dark circles. Unless you've been living under a rock, you would know that ocular plastic surgery is widely practised and is now common not only in Asia but worldwide. While this may be the case, do we actually understand what these surgeries entail and how the procedures are carried out?

Mariel Chow turns to ophthalmologist and ocular plastic surgeon, Professor Dr. Chua Chung Nen, and consultant plastic surgeon, Dr. Lee Kim Siea, for enlightenment on blepharoplasty for droopy upper lids, eyebags and other eye treatments.

DOUBLE EYELID SURGERY OR "ASIAN BLEPHAROPLASTY"

Double eyelid surgery is the most common aesthetic surgery procedure requested by East Asians (Chinese, Japanese and Koreans). Professor Dr. Chua Chung Nen explains that patients with double lids have natural adhesions along the skin crease between the eyelid skin and underlying eyelid muscle called the levator which is responsible for opening the eye. However, many East Asians do not possess this natural adhesion. As such, several methods have been developed for the creation of double eyelids. These methods can be broadly classified into two categories – the conventional incision method and the stitch method.

Prof. Chua states, "The incision technique involves removing the skin, muscle, and some fat to expose the levator muscle. Under direct visualisation, the cut edges of the skin are stitched directly to the levator muscles to form double eyelids."

The stitch technique, however, involves placing non-absorbing sutures such as nylon under the eyelid skin to anchor tissues such as the levator muscle or tarsal plate to create that coveted crease. To do this, Prof. Chua explains, three small cuts are made at the desired height for the crease and the sutures are put through these cuts to attach the surface

of the skin to the underlying structures.

Although there are only two main methods for Asian blepharoplasty, there are variations to these methods to lessen downtime and improve durability. Prof. Chua says that, with the incision method, instead of making full-length cuts across the eye, small incisions can be made in which only one third of the length of the eyelid is affected. This reduces downtime but still creates a long-lasting effect. With this method, mini incisions can be made along with fat removal before placement of the sutures to ensure permanency of the double eyelids.

COMPLICATIONS OF DOUBLE EYELID SURGERY

Dr. Lee Kim Siea says that there are a few complications associated with the Asian blepharoplasty. With the incision method, the more common adverse effects include asymmetry, hollow sunken eyes from removal of too much fat and even ptosis due to surgical accidents that may cause injury to the nerves or muscles.

With the stitch technique, the most common occurrence is the loss of the fold or crease over time. Dr. Lee Kim Siea says, "The stitch technique definitely doesn't last as long as the incision method because it's a blind technique. Stitches are applied without actually seeing where they are put. Because the adhesion between the tissue and skin can be weak, it can break down over time and that can happen as quickly as within a few months."

Dr. Lee Kim Siea asserts that he only recommends the stitch method to younger patients with no excess skin or fat on the lid. These patients benefit from decreased downtime and the chances of crease loss are diminished.

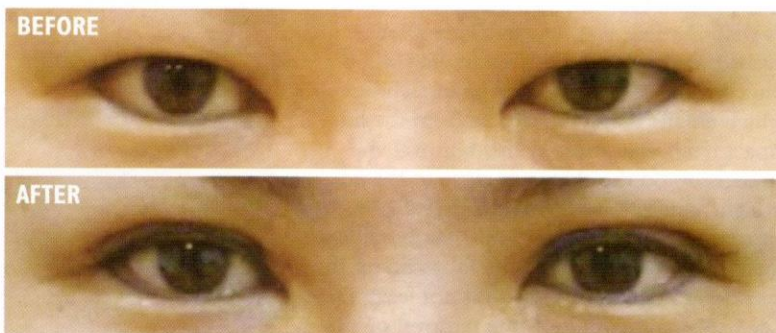
Both procedures can cause bleeding and infection. To curb these risks, Prof. Chua recommends that patients stop any medications such as aspirin or fish oil before the procedure as these may increase the chances of bleeding. To avoid infection, he recommends that patients keep all wounds clean with diligent application of prescribed antibiotic cream. Downtime is only one to two weeks for the stitch method and two to three weeks with the incision technique.



Ophthalmologist and ocular plastic surgeon, Professor Dr. Chua Chung Nen says that eye bag surgery usually takes 45 to 60 minutes because the surgeon needs to first address a variety of anatomical issues such as fat, excess skin, prominent muscles and tear troughs.



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A patient with puffy eyelids who has had double eyelid surgery through the incision method.

Photos courtesy of Dr. Chua Chung Nen.



Photos courtesy of Dr. Chua Chung Nen.

Right droopy eyelid after double eyelid surgery done elsewhere. The picture below shows the result after right eyelid revision.



Disappearing right double eyelid one year after stitch method for double eyelid. Small incision technique was used to create the right double eyelid.

EYEBAG REMOVAL

“Eyebags may be due to fat prolapse, skin laxity, eyelid fluid or prominent eyelid muscles. Therefore, before surgery, the surgeon needs to examine the patient carefully to decide which is the most prominent cause. Treatment will be tailored to the individual,” explains Prof. Chua. He says that there are many causes of eyebags and no one single technique can be used for all of them.

Dr. Lee, on the other hand says that eyebags result from fat herniation from the septum of the lower lid and this usually happens in patients aged over 35. While this may be the case, patients as young as 17 may have eyebags as well. He elaborates that there will usually be an accompanying tear trough deformity just below the eyebags as well. Dr. Lee says that there are a few eyebag removal techniques. The first will be the conventional method or open technique which entails removing the fat from the lid. Apart from that, there is also removal via an incision on the skin very close to the lid margin. This allows the doctor to remove any excess skin and most importantly, allows the doctor to redistribute the fat to fill up the tear trough deformity. Last but not least, Dr. Lee explains that there is the removal of the eyebag via the conjunctiva. This technique is

especially popular among young people without excess skin as it does not leave a visible scar.

Prof. Chua says that eyebag surgery usually takes 45 to 60 minutes because the surgeon needs to first address a variety of anatomical issues such as fat, excess skin, prominent muscles and tear troughs. Last but not least, patients will be given a sedative and longer lasting anaesthesia. Many patients find the most unpleasant part of the surgery to be the anaesthetic but, post-injection, the procedure itself is painless.

COMPLICATIONS RELATED TO EYEBAG REMOVAL

Like double eyelid surgery, the more common surgical side-effects from eyebag removal surgery are bleeding and infection. Other post-surgery



Patient with eyebags and excess skin before and one-week after surgery.

Photos courtesy of Dr. Chua Chung Nen.



Photos courtesy of Dr. Chua Chung Nien.

A patient who had significant eyebags and loose skin underwent fat repositioning and skin excision. Post-operatively, there was malposition of the eyelids which improved spontaneously over three weeks.

side effects, Dr. Lee adds, are swelling, bruising, ectopion (eyelids reverting outwards), and incomplete or inadequate fat removal or redistribution. Different patients will recover differently depending on their constitution and age. Apart from that, Prof. Chua adds that patients with more tissue manipulation during surgery or who bleed during surgery can also expect more downtime. He states, "Post-surgery care is vital. If patients are diligent with cold compresses and rest, they are likely to recover faster. Recovery time normally takes between seven to 10 days."

DARK CIRCLE CORRECTION

According to Prof. Chua, correction of dark circles is about treating the cause. Again, there isn't just one treatment suitable for all forms of dark circles. He says, "Because there is no one method that works for everyone, not every patient will benefit from the various treatments which claim to treat dark circles."

Dark circles are caused by a number of factors which include:

- Dark skin tone. Because some patients are prone to darker skin under the eyes, this can be inherited making undereye circles more common amongst people of a certain race;
- Hollowness below the eyes can occur with ageing due to the reduction of fat, hence producing dark circles;

- Eyebags or fat under the eyes can cast shadows giving the appearance of dark circles;

- Allergies can also cause dark circles as increased blood flow to the eyelids can make them appear much darker. In addition, patients with allergies tend to rub their eyelids and chronic rubbing can cause the skin to darken from increased melanin production.

Dr. Lee says that lasers can work well if the cause of the dark circles is due to pigmentation, though this is not so for all cases. If there is hollowness, the tear trough can be treated with filler. The most common complications from lasers are pigmentation; with fillers it is the short-term bruising after injection, he explained. Should patients have dark circles due to fat under the eyes, eye bag removal would really be the best treatment option.

Lifestyle modification might go some way towards relinquishing the appearance of dark circles around the eyes. Dr. Lee advises that dark circles can sometimes be treated at home simply by having enough rest and regular eye massages to improve circulation; while Prof. Chua recommends less smoking, less alcohol consumption and less direct exposure to UV rays to reduce them.