



Thread-lifts: A face-lift alternative? Or not?

BY LILY TALAKOUB, MD, AND
NAISSAN O. WESLEY, MD

The rise of noninvasive procedures has shifted the aesthetic culture. Patients now are asking for less invasive, less painful, less expensive procedures with short recovery times. Thread-lifts are one of the newest approaches to nonsurgical facial tightening. However, are they of value? Where, and for whom?

Conceptually, the thread-lift is the suspension of ptotic facial soft tissue via a thread subcutaneously inserted

of use. Primarily marketed for the neck, jowls, and lower face, these threads – available in various sizes, lengths, and diameters – can be used almost anywhere. The sutures dissolve over time and do not need any anchoring, making it a very simple in-office procedure.

Side effects include mild procedural pain, edema, erythema, bruising, and rarely, suture granuloma formation; and they may need to be replaced. If not done properly, buckling of the skin can occur and superficially placed sutures can be visible.

Similar to fillers that provide a “liquid face-lift,” the down time is minimal.

tissue tightening lasers, face-lifts, and the thread-lift procedures. Fillers used in combination with thread-lifts also increase the longevity of the thread-lift because of additional collagen stimulation.

As the procedure is not indicated for severe laxity, thread-lifts also do not replace the traditional face-lift. Tissue is not released from its underlying attachments, and skin contraction and gravitational pull limit its extent of improvement and its longevity.

Long-term success of the thread-lift procedure for facial rejuvenation was evaluated in a retrospective review of 33 patients who underwent the traditional thread-lift procedure alone or in combination with other facial rejuvenation procedures to the brow, mid-face, jowl, and neck published in 2009.¹ The study compared results in 10 patients who had a thread-lift alone, 23 who had thread-lifts combined with other procedures, and controls, who were 10 patients who had non-thread-lift rejuvenation procedures, which included lipotransfer, chemical peels, and rhytidectomies. Independent, blinded, board-certified facial plastic surgeons evaluated pre- and postoperative photos. Patients were followed-up for a mean of 21 months.

At 1 month, aesthetic improvements were observed in all treatment groups. Measurable results through the end of the study period were seen in all the patient groups, with the exception of the group of patients who had the thread-lift procedure alone. Aesthetic improvements observed in the control group were significantly better than were the improvements in the thread-lift only group. In addition, aesthetic improvement scores among those who had the thread-lift plus other procedures were significantly better than were the scores among those who had the thread-lift only.

The authors concluded that the thread-lift procedure resulted in only short-term improvements, because of the edema and inflammation related to the procedure. They also concluded that thread-lifts were not effective because they did not produce any volumetric change and only superficially repositioned the soft tissues without addressing excess skin.

While thread-lifts are a beneficial addition to our armamentarium of non-invasive aesthetic procedures, they have better outcomes and higher patient satisfaction when used in combination with fillers, radiofrequency, and fractional lasers and neuromodulators. ■

Reference

1. Abraham RF et al. Arch Facial Plast Surg. 2009 May-Jun;11(3):178-83.



Digital Vision/Thinkstock

in the skin. It is an easy, fast, in-office procedure in which a cone attachment or barbed or nonbarbed suture thread is inserted via a cannula into the skin through a very small incision. The thread is essentially “hooked” to the skin and, with a minimal amount of tightening, the skin is lifted and the suture is cut at the insertion point. The sutures dissolve and, over time, produce scar tissue.

The thread-lifts initially came onto the market in the late 1990s but were difficult to use. The nonabsorbable threads had to be anchored into the scalp, temple, and brow region. The anchoring knots were carefully tied and were permanent. The newest technology threads – NovaThreads and the Silhouette Instalift – have recently received Food and Drug Administration clearance and grown in popularity because of their “lunchtime” appeal and their ease

Common side effects include bruising, and patients should refrain from heavy exercise and opening their mouth wide with chewing for 5-7 days (such as eating a large apple). Soreness, particularly in or near the hairline or jaw line, can occur and can last up to 2 weeks. Dimpling in the skin can occur and usually resolves on its own; however, if threads are placed incorrectly, dimpling can cause some disfigurement.

Results can vary based on the tissue laxity, and the type, amount, and location of the threads used. While results have been reported to last 18 months to 2 years, the procedure is not a replacement for fillers. Facial aging is caused by a combination of skeletal, soft tissue, and skin changes that lead to soft tissue laxity and volume loss. Fillers are essential in restoring lost volume in the aging face and are particularly helpful in combination with



Dr. Talakoub and Dr. Wesley are cocontributors to this column. Dr. Talakoub is in private practice in McLean, Va. Dr. Wesley practices dermatology in Beverly Hills, Calif. This month's column is by Dr. Talakoub. Write to them at dermnews@frontlinemedcom.com. They had no relevant disclosures.

Results can vary based on the tissue laxity, and the type, amount, and location of the threads used.

While results have been reported to last 18 months to 2 years, the procedure is not a replacement for fillers.