

### My 24-carat gold facelift (and there's not a knife in sight)

By Bonnie Estridge

Last updated at 11:53 PM on 09th August 2008

The gold thread facelift - it sounds incredible and gruesome in equal measure.

Using just needle and thread, a finely woven 24-carat mesh framework is sewn under the surface of the skin where it remains.

It is not a procedure for the faint-hearted. The patient remains awake as four yards of gold thread are inserted, the only painkiller being dozens of local anaesthetic injections applied to the face.

And despite the patient being almost £2,000 poorer on leaving the surgery, there is no instant gratification. Id-f...





Satisfied customer: Jan Caswell before the facelift and, right, afterwards

For this facelift takes three months to show the results, as the gold mesh stimulates the body's own production of collagen, which in turn plumps up the skin naturally.

But how exactly does this new procedure work?

Ten weeks ago, Jan Caswell, a 50-year-old advertising executive, became one of seven people in the UK to have this treatment. It was carried out by cosmetic dermatologist Alexandra Chambers, who has the extraordinary distinction of being an NHS GP in Tower Hamlets, South-East London, but also a private practitioner in Harley Street specialising in non-surgical facelifts.

Dr Chambers, 41, is the only practitioner to offer gold threading in the UK and learned the technique in her native Russia, where it is commonly used.

Eleven years ago Jan, who is divorced and has two teenage daughters, suffered from Bell's Palsy, a common condition affecting about one in 60 people at some point in their life. It is the sudden paralysis of the facial muscles on one side of the face and although it has no obvious cause, can be linked to stress.

'It had made me pretty self-conscious of my appearance as it weakened the left side of my face and caused it to droop,' says Jan. 'But I wasn't hankering after looking younger, rather looking the best I could for my age.'

'I would never have considered going under the knife, nor would I have had Botox or injectable fillers because I don't believe in putting substances that may have long-term side effects into my body.'

When Jan heard about Dr Chambers via a mutual friend, she hoped the procedure might correct the droop.

Dr Chambers has ten years' experience of carrying out the procedure in Russia and France and explains: 'Thin gold wire is inserted into the subdermal layer of skin, literally just under the surface, which stimulates increased production of collagen around the threads in response to the presence of a foreign substance.'

Collagen is the name given to naturally produced fibrous proteins formed within a range of body cells providing them with structure. It can be found in skin, hair, bone, tendons, cartilage, scar tissue and even teeth.



Skin deep: An artist's impression of where the gold thread is stitched beneath the skin

As we age, our production of collagen and fibroblasts - which help make up the support structure for tissues and organs - degenerates and this leads to wrinkles and poor skin quality. However, it is possible to stimulate the production of collagen in the skin cells to rejuvenate it.

The most effective way is by creating a 'trauma' to the skin by injecting fillers or simply by 'wounding' it (when we cut ourselves collagen and fibroblast production are stimulated to produce the fresh new skin that grows over the wound).

New blood vessels appear when the healthy tissue begins to grow and this means the blood supply to the treated areas is increased, all of which should eventually result in the skin becoming rejuvenated as it is firmer and thicker. This is, partly, the principle behind the gold thread facelift.

'Initial swelling disappears within a few days and a difference in skin texture can be seen in ten days and will continue to improve with optimum results at three months,' says Dr Chambers.

'This procedure is not just for the face; it can be used on the neck, décolletage, hands, arms, legs, abdomen and even the buttocks.

'Pure gold is an essential component of the treatment as it cannot react with any other substance it comes into contact with. This reduces the risk of an unseen allergic reaction or any structural or chemical changes to the gold under the skin. Gold cannot oxidise either, that is to say it cannot rust.

'Over five to ten years, the fine gold sutures gradually become fragmented as they are broken down naturally,' Dr Chambers says.

Jan's procedure took 90 minutes. It began with Dr Chambers covering Jan's face in cream to numb it before injecting her with local anaesthetic.

'She worked on each section of my face at a time, injecting anaesthetic then threading the gold into first the forehead, then each cheek and then under the chin,' says Jan.

'It was uncomfortable but I really couldn't feel any pain. My face was numb, and I could feel a tugging sensation, which was not pleasant.'

When the work was complete, Dr Chambers advised Jan not to look in the mirror for 24 hours.

'She had warned me that there would be swelling and probably bruising but nothing prepared me for the way my skin felt to the touch. It felt horribly rubbery; very thick and terribly tight, as though my face was trussed up. Despite this, I took the train home to West Sussex.'

One thing that Jan regrets is not telling her 16-year-old daughter Hannah about the lift to prepare her for the shock of seeing her battered-looking mother when she walked through the front door.

'I had not looked in the mirror before I got home but then I couldn't resist and that's when I saw just how dreadful I looked,' says Jan.

'I had two black eyes coming on and prick marks all over my face. All I could do was comfort Hannah and tell her it would all be fine.'

Back at work four days later, Jan's face was still swollen and she was on a course of antibiotics to lessen the chance of infection. Apart from this precaution, there was no specific recommended aftercare apart from keeping the area clean.

'I felt fine,' says Jan, 'but I was most alarmed a few days later when two of the threads started emerging from my forehead and cheek.'

'Dr Chambers had said that this could happen when the body recognises a foreign substance, but it was scary nonetheless. I made an appointment to see Dr Chambers and she snipped a centimetre off each thread.'

Now, ten weeks later, Jan's skin is noticeably glowing and her cheek area has lifted.

The left cheek area that was weakened by Bell's Palsy looks virtually identical to the other side and the effect should improve even further over the next few months.

But what exactly do other health professionals think of such a drastic procedure?

'Any procedure involving inserting needles or incisions in the skin is likely to cause bruising and, in this particular instance, the result of having 40 injections and being subjected to stitching beneath the skin is unsurprising to say the least,' says London GP Keith McKee.

'The reason bruising occurs specifically in a case like this is because the minute blood vessels in the skin - arterioles and venules - have been punctured or cut, causing bleeding under the skin.'

'Any such trauma in the eye area will cause considerable bruising to show up as "black eyes" because although the eye itself has not been injured, blood collects in the space around it. The swelling Jan experienced is a natural inflammatory reaction of the body to injury and occurs when small blood vessels are damaged, which then leak fluid into the surrounding tissue.'

'If you are stitching a surface wound you can see what you are doing, but when you are stitching beneath the skin, you are virtually doing it "blind" which, if you are in the wrong hands, could be hazardous.'

'Apart from tissue damage and so on, the skin could end up puckering.'

'But the trauma to the patient is in a local area and one would not expect them to go into shock - in the physiological sense of the word.'

'The therapist would have to make absolutely sure the patient did not have a predisposition to any form of bleeding disorder or was taking blood-thinning medication such as warfarin or even aspirin as it could cause haemorrhaging and end up a real disaster.'

I have considerable reservations about this procedure. Anyone considering it should feel absolutely assured that the practitioner comes highly recommended and has a known success rate because if things go wrong - which they can and do with any surgical procedure - one might live to regret it.'

David Fenton, consultant dermatologist at St John's Institute of Dermatology, St Thomas' Hospital, London, says: 'On the basis of the gold network provoking a foreign-body reaction and therefore stimulating "fibrosis" - the formation of fibrous tissue in a reactive repair process - there is acceptable science behind the procedure because fibrosis makes the skin thicker.

It also has FDA approval and studies from the Seventies show that this kind of sub-dermal weaving could help those with facial palsies.

'However, it seems an odd thing to want to do. There must be easier - and less expensive - ways to make the skin look glowing and rejuvenated without having someone sewing your face?'

Jan, however, is delighted with her result. 'I can see a difference and all my friends are telling me how great my skin looks. It has to be worth all the money because it has done wonders for my confidence.'

- Dr Alexandra Chambers Gold Thread Skin Rejuvenation, from £1,800.

#### Stitch by stitch guide

1. The areas to be treated are covered with a numbing cream and injected with local anaesthetic.
2. The 24 carat, 0.1mm diameter, 99 per cent pure gold thread is implanted into the anaesthetised area, threaded within the skin under the epidermis using a 1mm gauge needle and a blanket-type stitch to create a net-like structure that will provide a mechanical support to the overlying skin.
3. The thread must be implanted accurately into the 'papillary dermis' - the layer of skin directly beneath the surface.
4. The doctor repeats this process in all the areas to be treated.
5. The face is cleaned and make-up can be applied to cover up bruised or red areas.

Find this story at [www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-1043156/My-24-carat-gold-facelift-theres-knife-sight.html](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-1043156/My-24-carat-gold-facelift-theres-knife-sight.html)

---