

Fillers for dark under-eye circles and nose-to-mouth lines

Patient diary

The consultation

I chose Mr Malhotra because he is a specialist eye surgeon whose primary expertise is in ophthalmic and reconstructive work – and he's based at the home of plastic surgery, The Queen Victoria Hospital in East Grinstead.

It means that he won't try to give you the celebrity look of the moment but instead studies your face and takes on board what you want out of the procedure.

Me, I wanted to stop looking tired all the time, with heavy dark shadows under my eyes. I didn't know what procedure would do the trick, if any, but Mr Malhotra did.

"You need a new procedure called tear trough fillers," he said confidently.

Essentially, he fills the hollows that develop between the top of the cheekbones and the under-eye area, using minute amounts of Restylane – the same filler that has been used successfully for years on other facial lines.

It's made of hyaluronic acid, which exists naturally in the body and is gradually absorbed over time, usually between six and 12 months. It's safe, stable and, if you do get any lumpiness or don't like the result, it can be dissolved with a further injection.

I asked him to deal with my strong nose-to-mouth lines as well.

Be warned: there is a charge for the initial consultation, even if you don't go ahead, and it isn't deducted from the price of the procedure. But you wouldn't expect to get a free check-up from one of the world's top dentists, would you? And Mr Malhotra is one of the world's top eye men. It's money well spent for getting the most expert advice available.

The procedure

Like a fool, I forgot to take any painkillers before the procedure, so it hurt. Take your paracetamol as instructed – I've been back twice for annual top-ups and it makes a real difference. Mr Malhotra now gets you to hold an ice pack against the area he's about to inject and that numbs things too. He isn't keen on giving you local anaesthetic because it changes your natural expressions and means that the results might not be as good but, if you have a really low pain threshold and are prepared to pay extra, it is an option.

When I had my first treatment, Mr Malhotra was developing the protocol for using Restylane for tear trough filling, so his Fellow was there to observe. That meant he talked her through what he was doing, so I knew what was going on and why. If you want to ask him anything or to translate medical jargon, he's happy to do so.

Raman Malhotra

Consultant ophthalmic and oculoplastic surgeon

The nose-to-mouth lines were actually more painful but no worse than a palatal injection at the dentist. Mr Malhotra doesn't simply fill the lines: he injects fullness above and along them, so your skin is lifted up and some of the facial volume you had when you were younger is restored. He apologises most sincerely when you wince but it doesn't stop him – he clearly enjoys his work. I drew the line at allowing him to use the last of the filler in my top lip, though. I'd definitely want a dental block before I let that happen.

Afterwards

There's some blood along the injection sites and the beginnings of a bruise or two – I do bruise easily, though, and the ice packs help to keep that under control. Once the work is done, there's no pain at all – not even mild discomfort. It's way less unpleasant than, say, root canal work. Even so, I wouldn't schedule an important meeting or party immediately after the procedure, unless you have a skilled make-up artist on hand.

There's no need for any downtime, though. I was back in the office the next morning, with the bruises (in a couple of places under the eyes and more extensive around the nose-to-mouth lines, where there was some bruising on my chin too) covered reasonably well with ordinary concealer.

The bruising took a week to disappear, the minor swelling a little longer and I'm thrilled with the results.

I don't look precisely younger – just fresh, well-rested and happier. The results are especially noticeable in photographs – I used to look like a disapproving panda and now I look bright and bubbly. There's no lumpiness. I still get dark shadows when I'm tired but they're much easier to cover. I only wish I'd been able to have this done years ago.

Even my husband, who was both sceptical and worried, is impressed, and I've had no complaints from him when I've gone back for more. Luckily, my body seems to hold onto the fillers quite well and I only need a top-up once a year.

In a few years, I'll probably have some volume added to my cheekbones as well. Mr Malhotra suggests that fat transfer could be the answer in that case but promises that whatever he does will be conservative. If you get a bit gung-ho, he'll talk you out of having more done. That's one of the reasons that my visits to him are now an annual fixture.