Waiting for Alberto

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Mohawk

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A lighter touch

New, less invasive face-lift technique called threadlift is gaining in popularity

EDITOR’S NOTE: This is the first of two stories about a new face-lift procedure called a threadlift. Today, we visit patient Samantha Buck of Scotia before she undergoes the procedure. On Thursday, The Gazette recounts the surgery and revisits with Buck following the recovery process.

BY ELYSIA NEST
Gazette Reporter

Samantha Buck has no intention of growing old gracefully.

For nearly 30 years, she has endured multiple rounds of silicone shots, fat injections and, more recently, Botox, to keep wrinkles at bay and prevent minor lines from developing into deeper creases.

Now, she is facing a demon of a different sort — sagging skin.

“What’s happening is stuff I can’t hide anymore,” said Buck, 56, jostling her jawline upward with her hands and pinching what she describes as the beginnings of a turkey neck — excess skin that jiggles just below the chin.

“I used to think I could pass for somebody in my late 30s or early 40s. Other times, I think I look like I’m in my mid- to late-40s... And it’s only going to get worse,” said the Scotia resident, who relocated to the area with her husband, Jeff, from Manhattan five years ago.

NO ORDINARY FACE-LIFT

While she still plans on keeping up with “maintenance injections” to smooth forehead furrows, plump expression lines and peck away at crow’s feet, Buck said it is time to further her efforts by undergoing a youth preservation tactic of a different kind — a face-lift.

Rather than a traditional face-lift, during which plastic surgeons cut and trim away excess skin, however, Buck is opting for a new, less invasive technique, known as a threadlift.

In the Capital Region, the procedure is frequently performed by Edwin Williams III of the Williams Center For Facial Plastic Surgery in Latham.

Williams, who will be working on Buck, said the roughly one-hour, in-office procedure is innovative in that it allows the plastic surgeon to make a series of tiny incisions hidden within a patient’s hairline and, using a thin, hollow needle, thread barbed sutures into tissues lying just below the skin’s surface. The surgeon then cuts and knots each thread, instantly giving the skin a lifted, more youthful appearance.

In the weeks to follow, the body surrounds the barbs with collagen — skin’s naturally occurring connective tissue — to help support the face in its elevated position.

ALL THE RAGE

Also known as the feather lift, lunchtime lift or suspension lift, the threadlift has emerged as one of the

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NO CUTTHROAT

Actor Jeremy Piven says he is nothing like the cutthroat agent he plays on the HBO series “Entourage,” which has begun its third season.

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Threadlift: Procedure is less invasive but also less dramatic

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t most requested facial fixes in recent months.
For one, it can be performed under local anesthesia with costs falling far short of an invasive face-lift — ranging between $3,000 and $6,000, compared with the $8,000 to $15,000 price tag associated with more invasive options.
Conventional face-lifts also take about four hours to complete and require weeks or months of recovery.

With the [invasive] face-lift procedure, I have patients 10 and 12 years out that still have a nice result. [The threadlift] is for people who are willing to accept noticeable but limited improvements."

DR. EDWIN WILLIAMS
On the lifespan of the thread lift procedure

On the other hand, threadlift results are usually less dramatic, averaging between 60 percent and 70 percent of what a more invasive surgical face-lift procedure can deliver. Also, the lifespan of a threadlift is estimated to be about half that of surgical facelifts.

So far, more than 9,000 threadlifts have been performed using Contour Threads, the only brand of threads approved for use by the Food and Drug Administration. Thousands of other procedures have been completed using another brand known as Apts sutures.

Williams, who has been performing the surgery since early July, says the new lifts are a wonderful alternative to full face-lifts for a host of people.

Ideal candidates, he explained, usually exhibit mild to moderate drooping of the brow, cheeks, jowls and neck who would like to see a lift effect, but do not want the risk, scars or recovery of a full browlift, facelift or necklift operation.

In most cases, clients choose to maximize their results by combining a threadlift with other procedures to fill in lines, add volume and remove fatty deposits, said Williams.

Patients between the ages of 35 and 50 are usually best-suited for the newer lift, because their needs tend to be more modest, he said.

Some Risks

Even in the hands of a board-certified plastic surgeon, however, there can be complications.

Sometimes, threads bunch up, break or protrude through the skin. Or the sutures, made of polypropylene and covered with tiny fishhook-like appendages, can be felt or seen. Then there are the results. Some detractors say that once the swelling disappears, so does the younger look.

"With the [invasive] face-lift procedure, I have patients 10 and 12 years out that still have a nice result," Williams said. "I know exactly what we can accomplish with the surgical procedure, and I can also do a much better job. [The threadlift] is for people who are willing to accept noticeable but limited improvements," he said, estimating its lifespan at between four and five years.

For Buck, who wants to avoid going under the knife for as long as possible, that sounds just fine.

"I feel as if I'm 34, even though with every birthday I am getting older. I am going to be stuck at 34 or 35 until the day I die," she said.

"And I don't think this is a vain thing and, if it is, I don't mind being vain."

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Dr. Edwin Williams talks about the threadlift procedure, a more modest face-lift procedure.