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PLUMP YOUR POUT

In pursuit of fuller lips? Liz Krieger investigates what really works.

YES, THE EYES are the windows to the soul. But the truth is that no one is looking at your beautiful blinkers if they're distracted by thin, dehydrated lips. Aging, sun damage, smoking—all can leave your lips deflated, ridged, and resembling a grimace more than a youthful smile, says New York and Miami dermatologist Fredric Brandt. Read on for treatments (and makeup tricks) that deftly offset the deflation.

NATURAL-LOOKING FILLERS The preferences of certain Real Housewives notwithstanding, the majority of women today want a believably plump, understated pout, not the “trout pouts” that draw tabloid attention, says New York dermatologist Anne Chapas. The most popular treatment for creating natural but lush lips is injecting fillers, which add back lost (or never quite God-given) volume, as if restuffing a pillow. Both Chapas and Brandt favor hyaluronic acid gels (such as Restylane, Juvéderm, and Belotero) over substances like collagen, which tends to disappear within a few weeks. Hyaluronic acid, on the other hand, sticks around for up to 12 months. Another reason it's a volume VIP, says Beverly Hills dermatologist Harold Lancer, is that it's unlikely to cause an allergic reaction, and in the event that you don't like the result, there's an antidote that can dissolve the filler. (Note: There's always the chance of scarring when inserting a needle through thin skin.) The actual injections involve as much art as they do science, so what you use and where you use it are key. “For adding volume I stay within the lip line; otherwise you can get into ‘duck lip’ territory,” advises Brandt. Because Juvéderm has a bit more stiffness and structure to it, notes Chapas, many experts find it's best for older women or those who need restoration. Belotero has more suppleness, so it's great for a more pouty appearance. (And the best fix for vertical lines, says Brandt.) And since the lips need to work in context with the rest of your face, the needlework might extend beyond your mouth. “The chin, cheeks, and nose have to provide a supportive background. Bigger lips could look out of proportion on a ‘fallen’ face,” says New York dermatologist Heidi Waldorf. Cost: \$600–\$1,000 per treatment.

THE CASE FOR FAT While fillers may get the most play for their relative ease of use, some doctors insist that the best material for achieving a natural look remains the stuff we're always trying to trim off elsewhere—namely, your own fat. “It's more forgiving than fillers in

that it flows smoothly and doesn't have a tendency to lump or migrate,” says Lawrence Koplin, a Beverly Hills plastic surgeon. “We can inject it into the lips themselves or along the lip border to create different effects, and it's permanent. I also place micro grafts of fat into individual vertical lip lines to eradicate them in the most natural, permanent way possible.” That permanence can, of course, have its downsides, says Waldorf. Koplin admits that compared with fillers—which are pretty much an in-and-out procedure—the fat-transfer process is more involved. (You have to harvest the fat before injecting it, among other things.) But he counters that fillers are quite expensive, are temporary, and, most important, are not alive. “Fillers act as a spacer or an oil slick in the middle of living tissue,” explains Koplin. “Because the lips are so active, having foreign material in the lips makes them move more slowly and stiffly. That's why you might see someone who looks good in a photograph, but when talking they look as if they just walked out of a dentist's office.” Cost: \$3,500–\$6,500.

QUICK LIP LIFT There's yet another option for women who have lost volume over the years, Lancer says, and it works immediately. He's referring to his method of subcision, a surgical technique similar to that used to treat scar tissue. Subcision of the lips involves moving a tiny cannula under the surface of the lip area to break up the tight fibrous bands that pull the skin in and down. This lifts and expands the area and gives lips a supple, pillowy look. And because the tissue is no longer bound, it fills out the deflated skin and lines instantly. “It's like snipping parachute strings,” says Lancer. Cost: \$400 per treatment; three or four are recommended.

HOW TO FAKE IT Test-drive the look of a fuller pout with a plumping gloss, such as Laura Mercier Lip Plumper (\$30), containing ingredients that irritate and swell the lips. Conditioning lip treatments often include collagen or hyaluronic acid; each absorbs water and gives a swollen effect. (Our pick: La Prairie Anti-Aging Eye and Lip Contour Cream; \$190.) Remember that glossy, light shades make lips look larger than matte, dark ones, says New York makeup artist Ashleigh Ciucci. Another trick: Add a tiny dot of highlighter just above your Cupid's bow and under the center of your lower lip (try Nars Illuminator in Copacabana; \$30), and voilà! You can kiss your thin lips goodbye. ■