SARAH AVILA MD
OCULOFACIAL PLASTIC SURGERY

Post-Operative Instructions: Facial Fat Grafting (Fat Transfer)

What Is Facial Fat Grafting?

Facial fat grafting, also called fat transfer, is a procedure that restores volume to the face using your body's own fat. Fat is gently harvested from an area such as the abdomen, flanks, or thighs, processed, and carefully transferred to areas of the face that have lost volume. Fat grafting can improve facial contours and restore a more youthful, natural appearance. Because the procedure uses living fat cells, some of the transferred fat will be naturally absorbed during the healing process.

Immediately After Surgery

- You must have a responsible adult drive you home if you received sedation or general anesthesia.
- Keep your head elevated using 2–3 pillows or a recliner for the first 5–7 days, including while sleeping.
- Avoid icing the grafted areas however you may apply a cool compress. Never apply direct pressure to grafted areas.
- Avoid rubbing, massaging, or pressing on areas where fat was transferred.
- Sleep on your back and avoid sleeping on your face or sides if this places pressure on the grafted areas.
- Avoid tight facial garments, masks, or anything that compresses the treated areas.

Swelling and Bruising

- Swelling and bruising are expected in both the face and the area where fat was harvested.
- Swelling may peak between days 3–5, particularly around the eyes.
- You may initially appear overfilled or notice asymmetry. This is common and does not represent your final result.
- Most visible bruising and swelling improve significantly within 2–3 weeks, although subtle swelling and firmness can persist longer.
- Small lumps, areas of firmness, or temporary irregularities may occur as the fat settles and surrounding tissues heal.
- Do not attempt to massage or smooth out irregularities

Activity Restrictions

- First 48 hours: Rest quietly. Light walking around the house is encouraged.
- First week: Avoid bending forward, heavy lifting, straining, or activities that increase facial swelling.
- First 2 weeks: Avoid strenuous exercise, running, weightlifting, and vigorous cardio.
- After 2–3 weeks: Gradually resume normal activities as tolerated and as cleared by our office.
- Avoid swimming pools, hot tubs, saunas, steam rooms, and excessive heat until your incisions have healed and you have been cleared.
- Avoid direct sun exposure to bruised or healing skin. Use SPF 30+ once appropriate and protect treated areas from prolonged sun exposure.

Donor Site Care (Abdomen, Flanks, or Thighs)

Fat is harvested through small incisions, which generally heal with minimal scarring.

- Keep the donor-site incisions clean and dry.
- You may typically shower after 24–48 hours unless instructed otherwise.
- Mild bruising, swelling, tenderness, and firmness at the donor site are normal.
- A small amount of pink or blood-tinged fluid may drain from the incision sites during the first 24–48 hours.
- Avoid soaking in bathtubs, pools, or hot tubs until the incisions are fully healed.
- Avoid applying creams, lotions, or other products directly to incisions.

Medications

- You may be prescribed antibiotic ointment to your incisions.
- You may take prescribed pain medication or Tylenol (acetaminophen) for discomfort.
- Avoid aspirin, ibuprofen, naproxen, and supplements that may increase bleeding for at least 7 days unless approved by your surgeon.
- Prescription pain medications may cause constipation. Stay hydrated and consider a stool softener if needed.
- Avoid alcohol while taking prescription pain medications.
- Avoid smoking, vaping, nicotine products, and secondhand smoke exposure, as nicotine and smoking can negatively affect healing and fat graft survival.

Protecting Your Fat Grafts

During the first several weeks, transferred fat cells are establishing a new blood supply. It is important to protect these areas while healing.

- Avoid direct ice to the area.
- Avoid pressure, massage, or manipulation of the grafted areas until cleared by Dr. Avila.
- Avoid sleeping directly on grafted areas.
- Do not use facial massage tools, gua sha, facial rollers, or similar devices.
- Avoid facials, aggressive skincare treatments, and cosmetic procedures in the treated areas until cleared.
- Maintain adequate hydration and nutrition, including sufficient protein.
- Avoid significant weight fluctuations during the healing period, as transferred fat may change in volume with weight gain or loss.

What to Expect Over Time

First Week: Swelling, bruising, and tenderness are most noticeable. Your face may appear fuller than expected, and temporary asymmetry is common.

Weeks 2–4: Most bruising and visible swelling begin to resolve. You may notice a reduction in facial fullness as swelling subsides and some transferred fat is naturally absorbed.

Months 1–3: The grafted areas continue to soften and settle. Some irregularities or asymmetries may improve during this period.

Months 3–6: Results become more stable as swelling resolves and the surviving fat establishes a lasting blood supply.

Long-Term Results

Not all transferred fat cells survive. Some natural absorption is expected, and the amount of retained fat varies from patient to patient.

Fat that successfully integrates can provide long-lasting volume restoration. However, the transferred fat remains living tissue and may change with aging and fluctuations in body weight.

In some cases, a second fat grafting session may be recommended to achieve the desired result.

When to Contact Our Office

Please contact us immediately if you experience:

- Sudden or severe pain, especially pain that is worsening rather than improving.
- Rapidly increasing swelling, particularly on one side.
- Increasing redness, warmth, tenderness, or foul-smelling drainage.
- Fever of 101°F (38.3°C) or higher.
- Skin that becomes unusually pale, dusky, mottled, or develops blisters.
- Significant or persistent bleeding from the donor site.
- New or worsening eye pain, double vision, or changes in vision.

Sudden vision loss, new significant visual disturbance, severe eye pain, shortness of breath, or chest pain requires immediate emergency medical attention. Call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department. Do not wait for a callback from our office.

Contact Information

Office: (305) 317-6448
Dr. Avila's Cell: (561) 901-7303

Your healing process is unique, and it is normal for results to evolve over several months. Please attend all scheduled follow-up appointments so we can monitor your recovery.