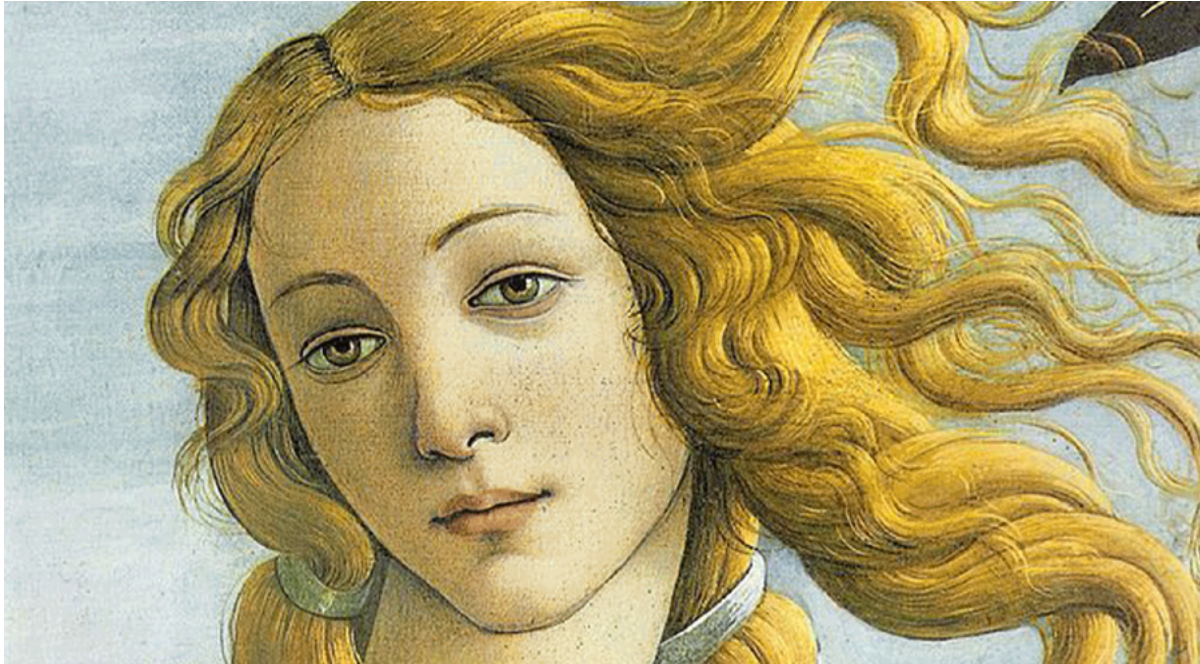


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Would You Pay \$1,500 for Dimples?

Beatrice Hazlehurst | January 29, 2024



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“I wish I knew about it sooner,” says Amanda*, a Minnesota-based hairstylist who arrived in aesthetics mecca Los Angeles for a cosmetic procedure. She has a heart-shaped face bolstered by round, cherub-like cheeks, and, in a “before” photo, looks much younger than her 29 years. But the “after” Amanda is even more youthful, although she hasn’t undergone a face lift or threading. She bought dimples.

While most cosmetic surgeries aim to rectify perceived imperfection, dimpleplasty actually imitates what textbooks would call a deformity. Indented cheeks are caused by a muscle flaw that contracts the attached skin into small depressions as it moves, says [Kimberly Lee](#), MD, a board-certified plastic surgeon based in Beverly Hills. In performing a dimpleplasty, she “recreates nature” by making two small incisions on the inside of the cheek, removing a small amount of tissue before stitching “slings” between the skin and muscle on either side of the area. There’s barely any discomfort, and minimal downtime. “I would say it’s similar to being at the dentist,” Amanda says of her experience.

In the past, creating dimples involved an external incision, says Jennifer Levine, MD, a board-certified plastic surgeon based in New York City. Now, most of these procedures are performed intraorally, or inside the mouth. “The patient can decide if they want a dimple on one side or both,” says Dr. Levine. To determine the most suitable depth and placement, she asks patients to suck in their cheeks and marks the point of maximum depression.

Drs. Lee and Levine are far from the only plastic surgeons performing dimpleplasty. In 2022, the global market size for dimple creation reached over \$302 million, and is estimated to grow by

at least another \$100 million by 2030. On TikTok, videos documenting the effects of cheek-fat compression devices (#dimplemakers, if you're curious) have racked upwards of 60 million views despite reports warning users are at risk of permanent nerve damage. For her part, Dr. Lee is inundated by Angelenos hoping to emulate the pitted cheeks of Miranda Kerr or Ariana Grande — so much so that securing an appointment with her necessitates a three-month wait time.

Psychologist Don Grant argues the reason dimples are so attractive is their synonymy with youth. For the Gen-Z woman, for whom girlhood is fundamental to identity (see: #GirlMath, #GirlDinner, #HotGirlSummer, and #ThatGirl), the fact that dimples are so appealing has been learned from decades of media reinforcement. Dr. Grant points to Shirley Temple, the earliest “literal poster child,” whose dimples became associated with a sweet, inviting persona.

Dr. Lee says the first dimpleplasty can be traced back to the 1930s, presumably when the sultry beauty standard set by silent film stars was bulldozed by the likes of Jean Harlow (the dimpled actor who died at 26 was unironically nicknamed “Baby”). Today, less than 20-30% of adults have naturally-occurring dimples, though excess fat in infants means there is a greater chance they might temporarily develop them before outgrowing them in adolescence.

Because of their rarity, Dr. Lee argues the dimple drive might also be attributed to a shift away from the very singular beauty that has dominated social media for the past decade. The late 2010s saw the rise of a near-ubiquitous look of big lips, button noses and stretched eyes (*LA girls all look the same, I don't recognize, same work done to their face, I don't criticize*, sang The Weeknd in on 2020 release, “Escape from LA”). Dr. Levine considers the desire for dimples to be cyclical. “This is a trend that waxes and wanes in popularity,” she says. “I do not recommend trends [as the impetus] for surgical procedures as the results tend to be permanent.”

But, like any trend, accessibility contributes greatly to widespread adoption. Unlike other pricier invasive procedures that require significant recovery, dimpleplasty has the relatively low cost of about \$1,500 (depending on your surgeon and where you live) and only calls for local anesthesia.

Amanda underwent a Zoom consultation before scheduling the procedure, which in and of itself only takes around 15 minutes. Swelling is expected to last a few days, and while the dimples are deep at first, they are expected to settle soon after. Amanda emphasizes the recovery process as “easy.”

“I had some swelling but that resolved in a week,” she says, adding that while the dimples were very prominent for a couple of weeks post-procedure, they started to become less defined as she healed.

While many associate dimples with fuller faces, Dr. Lee claims those with rounder cheeks are actually not ideal candidates for dimpleplasty. Oftentimes, she will need to first perform buccal fat removal — which involves creating an incision along the lower inner cheeks to remove, partially remove, or reposition the buccal fat pad — otherwise the dimples will not be visible. Ideally, a patient will naturally have a slight indentation that indicates a dimple wants to form when they smile.

“I look to see where the natural smile lines are going to be and use that as a guideline,” she says. “I want the dimples to be formed in a way that looks like they were natural and they were meant

to be there, and they may have even been there when the patient was born.”

Dimple creation is not without its downsides: While Dr. Lee says location and size are generally within the surgeon’s control, depth is subject to the underlying unique anatomy of the cheek. This means there is a chance of the dimple healing too deep, refusing to initially “take” or fading completely. Amanda, whose prior experience with aesthetics medicine was formerly limited to Botox and filler, says she was well-informed of this risk. Thankfully, the results are exactly what she imagined.

“Some people noticed and asked if I’ve always had dimples, but they had no idea I had this procedure done,” she says. “I’ve been getting so many compliments on them.”

Despite minimally-invasive procedures on the rise, Dr. Lee predicts the pendulum might soon swing once again. She has seen a significant uptick in more extensive surgeries – face lifts, neck lifts, and eyelid blepharoplasty – with patients beginning to recognize the limits of in-office treatments and injectables. Psychologists like Dr. Grant argues this unending pursuit of youth – in spite of the financial or physical cost – is simply social prejudice in action.

For Amanda, the two perfectly-symmetrical dents in her cheeks are simply cute. “I always wanted dimples growing up!” Now, she finally has them.

**Name has been changed*

<https://www.allure.com/story/dimpleplasty>