

Self-conscious video-chatting may be driving rise in chin implants

Watch out, Botox. The chin implant is the fastest growing cosmetic procedure among all demographics, according to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons. Blame the vanity spawned by a digital age of video-conferencing.

The ASPS cannot say exactly why chin augmentations soared 71 percent, from 12,077 in 2010 to 20,680 the following year — in both men and women. But anecdotal evidence suggests video chat technology is introducing people to a new side of themselves, and increasingly, they're not happy with the puffy visage staring back.

Chin implants have become an easy, cost-effective way to achieve a more chiseled, youthful appearance, said Dr. Pat Pazmino, a board-certified plastic surgeon in Miami. "They're seeing themselves more animated, more often," Pazmino said.

Picture this: Head tilted slightly downward to chat on your iPhone, your neck and chin doubling up in an unintentional way. "It's one thing to see pictures of yourself, but rarely do you see yourself talking. They're understanding that that's how other people are seeing them, and it's making them a little more self-conscious," he said.

Where the nation goes, Florida usually had gone first, said Dr. Galen Perdikis, president of the Florida Society of Plastic Surgeons. "These numbers are very reflective of plastic surgery in Florida. We tend to set a lot of these trends," said Perdikis, chief of plastic surgery at the Mayo Clinic in Jacksonville. "I think you're seeing a paradigm shift in how people view facial aging," moving from tightening and peeling to "facial sculpting." The economy is also playing a healthy role.

The interest in chin enhancements follows a more gradual overall growth in the industry, which saw 13.8 million cosmetic procedures performed in 2011, 5 percent more than the year before. With the recession easing and Americans finding they have more disposal income, more are fixing their imperfections, said board-certified plastic surgeon Dr. Paul Wigoda of Fort Lauderdale. "I would say there's an increase in general because of the economy," Wigoda said.

Video chat is driving more than chin implants. Wigoda has seen more patients come in complaining about how their nose looks on screen and seeking rhinoplasty.

For Claudia Silva, 32, of Miami Beach, it was her chin that stuck out. "Since I started using FaceTime and Skype, I really noticed I didn't look good," said Silva, a marketing agent with clients and family in Brazil. "When I looked at myself, I knew something wasn't right."

Silva went to Pazmino in January for a chin augmentation, a 45-minute procedure where a rubbery, flexible, pre-formed concave material is inserted through a small incision under the chin, or in the inner lip, and fitted over the end of the chin bone. Because the implant extends the chin, it also pulls tight the skin on the neck, giving it a thinner look, too.



"A lot of people looked at me and asked if I had been on vacation or if I had lost weight," Silva said. "It was a small change, but I think I look great. I feel more confident about myself."

Pazmino's chin augmentation business has grown from 30 to 40 procedures a year to about 60 last year.

Board-certified plastic surgeon Dr. Steven Schuster has also seen a distinctive bump at his Boca Raton office. "I've seen about a 25 to 30 percent increase in the number of men specifically coming in to ask for it," Schuster said. "A lot of men still do not want to do a face lift, and this is a wonderful, small procedure that really has significant effects."

Dr. Fredric Barr cautions against reading too much into a one-year bump, since chin implants represent a small number of the millions of cosmetic procedures performed last year. "In the grand scheme of things, [20,680] is not a really large number," said Barr, who hasn't noticed an unusual increase in the procedure in his West Palm Beach office, though business is up overall.

ASPS spokesman Darrick Antell, a New York City-based plastic surgeon, said while the doctor group was performing its annual statistical report on industry trends, the sudden surge in chin implants "just jumped out at us."

Much of the procedure's allure is that it tends to make for a dramatic but subtle improvement in someone's appearance — the patient looks distinctly better, but other people can't pinpoint exactly what is different. "The good news is that the chin implant is one of those operations that whispers, it doesn't shout," Antell said, adding that strong chins give off a sense of "strength, confidence, leadership, authority."

At an average cost of \$3,500 to \$7,500, the procedure is typically done in the office, under local anesthesia and a mild sedative, and patients are back to work within a few days. "It was very easy, very simple," said Silva, who required no pain medication. "My family keeps talking about it, and a lot of people I know want to do this now."

But some warn that chin implants are not for everyone. There are potential complications — the implant can move or harden, the bone can erode, infection is always a concern — and because it alters the patient's profile, the change can prove too dramatic for some, Barr said. "With the appropriate patient, with the appropriate condition and the right mind set, chin augmentation is a good surgery," he said. "But I think the key is balance."