

America's love affair with lips is leading to a boom in cosmetic procedures

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Dr. Robert Houser performs an exam on Kim Comisar following lip implant surgery. According to new data from the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, a record number of patients underwent lip implant surgery in 2015. Credit: American Society of Plastic Surgeons

A record number of patients underwent lip augmentation procedures in 2015, making them the second-fastest growing facial procedure in the United States since 2000. Only dermabrasion procedures have grown faster.

"We live in the age of the selfie, and because we see images of ourselves almost constantly on social media, we're much more aware of how our lips look," said David H. Song, MD, president of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons. "The good thing about [lip](#) procedures is that you have several options. You can change the shape of your lips as subtly as you want."

According to newly released data from the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS), the number of lip implant procedures grew by double-digits in every region of the country in 2015, gaining in popularity in both women and men. In all, there were 27,449 lip implants. On average, that's a lip implant procedure about every 19 minutes, and an increase of 48 percent since 2000.

In addition to the sharp rise in the number of lip implants, lip injections continued to show staggering growth as well. Between Botox® and Dysport® injections, and a variety of soft tissue fillers, lip procedures were part of nearly 9.2 million injection procedures in 2015, a combined increase of more than 1,000 percent since 2000.

"Lips are an easy place for people to start," said Robert Houser, DO, a plastic surgeon in Westerville, Ohio. "A patient may not be ready to commit to something as dramatic as a facelift or eyelid surgery, but there are a variety of ways you can change the shape of your lips."

Houser says the temporary nature of injections is both a pro and a con for patients. "If a patient doesn't like the injections, it's fine, because within a few months they wear off and everything is back to normal," he

said. "But if they do like what injections do for their lips, they have to keep coming back every few months to maintain them."

The alternative is a more permanent, but still reversible lip implant. "Lip implants have been around for quite a while, but new technology is taking the industry by storm," said Houser. "That's why we're seeing such growth in implant procedures."

Made from soft, flexible silicone, newer implants have proven to be both more stable and more pliable than previous implants, said Houser, and procedures are quick and require minimal recovery time.

"We make 2 small incisions in the corners of the mouth, use a tiny passing instrument to pull the implant into place, and you're done," said Houser. "Two stitches, very little bruising, minimal swelling and a very quick recovery."

Since the implants are intended to be permanent, patients no longer need to go back for repeated injections. However, if they decide they no longer want the implants, doctors can remove them.

Another benefit is that newer implants come in a variety of sizes. "It's all about the contour of the lips and the asymmetry of the face," said Houser. "The best looking lips aren't always the fullest."

In fact, ASPS commissioned a national survey asking more than a thousand women which celebrity's lips they would most like to have. Fuller-lip icons Angelina Jolie and Jennifer Garner came in 4th and 3rd place in the survey, respectively. Scarlett Johansson came in second, but it was the more subtle and sultry lips of Jennifer Lawrence that most people thought were the most attractive.

The desire to have more natural-looking lips may be driving up numbers

for lip reduction procedures, as well. According to the latest statistics from ASPS, there were 927 lip reduction surgeries in the United States last year, up more than 34 percent over 2013.

"I think the results show just how much lips can define a person's face," said Song. "Even if you're not born with a perfect pucker, working with your plastic surgeon, you can change your lips subtly."

"Going to the right doctor is crucial," added Houser. "Because they understand the entire asymmetry of the face and adhere to the highest level of safety standards, make sure you find a doctor board certified in plastic surgery and a member of ASPS." These procedures can be subtle and very natural looking, "but mistakes from less qualified providers can be obvious and disastrous," said Houser.

Provided by American Society of Plastic Surgeons

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