

Forever Fillers

If you could replace lost volume forever, would you?



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FINDING THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH

Whether you're making an annual foray into your cosmetic surgeon's office for HA

replacement, or deciding to pursue a longer-term correction, Dr. Niamtu lists six filler tenets to guide you on your journey to the filler Fountain of Youth:

- 1. "Permanent" is not always better.** "Permanent fillers could mean permanent problems," says Joseph Niamtu III, D.M.D., F.A.A.C.S.
- 2. The most popular fillers are popular for a reason.** "HA fillers are biocompatible (compatible with living tissue), reversible and last about a year — long enough to make it worth it," he explains.
- 3. Don't believe all the hype!** "Because something's new doesn't make it better. If it's good, it'll catch on," he says.
- 4. Don't have lofty expectations.** "We don't fully understand how products are metabolized, so it's difficult to predict how long they'll last, individually," Dr. Niamtu explains.
- 5. Never have a permanent filler the first time you try fillers.** "Test-drive the HA fillers first, to make sure you're happy," he warns.
- 6. If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.** "There's no such thing as a good deal," Dr. Niamtu advises.

First there was collagen. It required a pre-procedure allergy test and lasted a mere three months, at best. Then came the hyaluronic acid (HA) fillers Restylane (Medicis) and Juvéderm (Allergan). No allergy testing required, and results last about a year. And fillers continue to evolve. The latest development? Permanent fillers.

Long-term correction

No doubt, the idea of a permanent filler is attractive. At first mention, it sounds like a one-time fix, and who wouldn't want to "fix it and forget it"? But "I don't think any of them are 'permanent' permanent fillers," says Joseph Niamtu III, D.M.D., F.A.A.C.S., a board-certified facial cosmetic surgeon in Richmond, Va. "The face is dynamic, and skin changes over time," he says, which means that regardless of how "permanent" the product itself might be, you'll need to have some touch-up work done down the road.

So which fillers are considered permanent? These include silicone, Artefill (Suneva Medical) and Sculptra Aesthetic (Sanofi-Aventis). Artefill may last forever, but as the face changes over time, Artefill can move (sag) with the aging face and require correction or repositioning. Sculptra Aesthetic, on the other hand, may last for years, but the product eventually goes away. "It's called a permanent filler because it stimulates collagen," which is, of course, your own "permanent" filler, Dr. Niamtu says.

Product perfect

Take heed: Results with permanent fillers are only good if the product is injected perfectly. "Even expert injectors can get asymmetric results. It's easy to over-inject with these products," Dr. Niamtu says.

The golden rule with permanent fillers, according to Dr. Niamtu, is to have "appetizer-sized" portions. Unlike with HA fillers, "The goal is not to get full correction. You have to account for swelling and the effects of local anesthesia," he says.

What does this mean to you? It means that you'll likely undergo multiple injection sessions that build volume gradually. Because the products may also stimulate collagen (and you don't know how much collagen will be produced), this can also affect results. As a result, "It should be a gradual, sculpting process," Dr. Niamtu says. "I do it once per month until we get close to the end result goal."

Tried and true

Sometimes the tried and true is a better (in other words, safer) option — especially, Dr. Niamtu says, if it's your first time venturing into filler territory. "HA fillers are still popular for a reason," he says. "What's powerful about HAs is that you can reverse them. In other words, if you don't like your results, it's very easy to make them go away with a syringe. Permanent fillers require a scalpel." ❗

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