

Plastic surgery's the cutting edge for elderly

People in their 80s and even 90s are going under the knife for better bodies.

By Abby Ellin
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At age 83, Marie Kolstad has a rich life. She works full time as a property manager and keeps an active social calendar, busying herself with 12 grandchildren and 13 great-grandchildren.

But one thing needed improvement, she decided: her figure. At her age, she said, "your breasts go in one direction, and your brain goes in another." So on July 22, Kolstad, a widow who lives in Orange County, Calif., underwent a three-hour breast lift with implants, at a cost of about \$8,000.

"Physically, I'm in good health, and I just feel like, why not take advantage of it?" she said. "My mother lived a long time, and I'm just taking it for granted that that will happen to me. And I want my children to be proud of what I look like."

Kolstad is one of many septuagenarians, octogenarians and even nonagenarians who are burnishing their golden years with help from the plastic surgeon.

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There are as many reasons for getting plastic surgery as there are older patients, experts say. Some people are living longer and remaining healthier, and they want their physiques to align with their psyches. Some are preening for potential mates. Some are still working or looking for jobs and want to be seen as more youthful contenders.

And some are simply sick of slackened jowls, jiggy underarms and saggy eyelids. Gilbert Meyer, a retired film producer in Boynton Beach, Fla., who gave his age only as "over 75," saw Jacob Steiger, a facial plastic surgeon in Boca Raton, Fla., for an \$8,000 eye and neck lift last year.

"I was looking at myself in the mirror and didn't like what I was starting to see and did something about it," Meyer said. "Why not look as good as you can when you can?"

Mary Graham, 77, a restaurant owner in Thomasville, Ga., got a facelift and breast implants this year. "The only time I go to the doctor is for plastic surgery," she said.

Her plastic surgeon, Daniel Man of Boca Raton, Fla., who said he is seeing increasing numbers of patients over age 70, said, "These people are healthy and want to be an active part of society."

Any operation poses risks, but one report, published in the journal *Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery* in June, found that the hazards in people over age 65 are no greater than in the younger population.

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Some critics questions whether the benefits are worth the risks, which may be underestimated.

"The doctors have more or less financial incentives to do these procedures, and that often leads them to understate alternative kinds of treatments or medical advice," said James Hughes, executive director of the nonprofit Institute for Ethics and Emerging Technologies.

Nancy Etcoff, an assistant clinical professor at Harvard Medical School who studies biology and social beliefs about beauty, believes the idea of seniors getting plastic surgery disturbs some people because of our culture's mixed feelings about old people actively on the prowl. "Part of our stereotype of old people is that they are social, warm and likeable, but powerless and sexless," she said. "Here we are in the age of Viagra, which is very well-accepted, but suddenly the idea of older people, mostly women, wanting to be sexually attractive at that age makes us uncomfortable. If an older woman wants to regain eyelids or wants a breast that she doesn't have to tuck into a waistband, then why not?"

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