

# Reconstruction of the Face After Skin Cancer Excision



This patient had a basal cell cancer of the upper lip excised by her dermatologist. Closure involved advancement of the skin below the defect, placing one incision next to her laugh line to help hide the scar.

**W**hile skin cancer is the most common cancer in the United States, it is one of the few cancers with an increasing incidence over the last few years. The treatment of skin cancer is often surgical, involving not only removal of the cancer itself, but also repair of the resultant skin defect. When skin cancer affects the face, the goals of repair become more demanding than those cases involving less conspicuous areas of the body. It is the surgeon's job to repair the defect in a way that restores both facial appearance and function.

For this reason, a Facial Plastic Surgeon is often consulted to be a part of the treatment team in patients with skin cancer of the face. With specialized training in cosmetic and reconstructive surgery of the face and neck, this type of surgeon is uniquely suited for treating cancers of the face.

While every cut in the skin forms a scar, and no repair is truly invisible, the techniques employed in the reconstruction are critical for minimizing the scar's conspicuousness. Incisions are designed so that they are positioned in the natural creases and boundaries of the facial

structures, taking advantage of the normal lines and shadows of the face, to trick the observer's eye, and avoid attention.

Additionally, any skin that is removed must be replaced with skin of similar color and texture. When cancer invades tissues deep to the skin, such as cartilage or bone, a facial plastic surgeon must also replace those structures to insure that facial form and function are restored.

A consultation with the reconstructive surgeon prior to the excision of the skin cancer is often arranged so that the patient can understand the reconstructive plan and have some peace of mind before the process begins. If you or a family member is diagnosed with a facial skin cancer that requires excision here is a checklist of questions to ask:

- #1— What are the options to close the area if it is larger than expected?
- #2 — Will the repair be done in an office setting or a surgical setting?
- #3 — What should I expect about healing times and ways to promote good healing of the scars?

With the understanding of the important goals of repair, the reconstructive surgeon on your team will help support and guide you through the healing process.

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