

BEYOND FILLERS: THE NEW ERA OF INJECTABLE COLLAGEN STIMULATION

Your Weekly Newsletter

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First, What are Injectable Fillers?

- Injectable fillers are gels or soft materials placed into the dermis or subcutaneous tissue to “fill” wrinkles, folds, depressions, or volume deficits.... usually in the face.
- They are used both cosmetically (facial rejuvenation, contouring, lip augmentation) and medically (scar correction, facial lipoatrophy, some reconstructive indications).

Volume is the key concept. Fillers add volume where volume has been lost.

But, contrary to what social media and aesthetics marketing would have you believe, facial aging is not simply a “filler” or “volume” deficiency.

As a plastic surgeon who performs multiple facelifts each week, I consistently meet with patients who have been "over-promised" and "under-delivered" on their results with filler treatments. Unfortunately, medical professionals have created misleading names for their filler procedures:

- Liquid Lift
- Liquid Facelift
- Non-Surgical Facelift
- Injectable Facelift
- Facelift in a Syringe
- Lunch-Hour Facelift
- 30-Minute Facelift

The names are catchy and they promise things that patients dream of—getting a youthful lift without surgery. The problem is that these names are misleading... actually outright lies!

There is no such thing as a "liquid facelift".

Fillers do not lift the face. They add volume.

Well, maybe if you inject an entire bucket of filler, you can make a face appear tighter and fuller—but fuller is not the same thing as lifted. And that excess volume can create the illusion that you've been attacked by a swarm of bees.



To understand the correct use of injectable fillers, you first have to understand the anatomy of facial aging.

The Three Major Components of the Aging Face

1. The Skin

This is the layer everyone sees.

Over time, collagen and elastin decline. The skin becomes thinner, less elastic, and less capable of snapping back into place. Fine lines become wrinkles. Wrinkles become folds.

2. The Fat Layer

Most patients assume aging means accumulating more facial fat.

In reality, many areas of the face lose fat with age—particularly the cheeks, temples, around the eyes, and portions of the jawline. As this volume disappears, the face begins to look hollow, tired, gaunt, and less youthful.

3. The Muscle and Support Layer (SMAS/Platysma)...the “Deep Plane”

Beneath the fat lies a layer of muscle and connective tissue called the SMAS and platysma.

This is the structural foundation of the face. It anchors the skin and contributes to facial expressions.

With age, this layer stretches and descends. The cheeks begin to fall. Jowls develop along the jawline. Bands appear in the neck. The problem isn't a lack of volume—it's that the underlying support system has shifted downward.

One of the easiest ways to understand facial aging is to think about properly making a bed.

- The **fitted sheet** wrapped tightly around the mattress is analogous to the deep muscle layer - the SMAS and platysma layer. If it becomes loose and wrinkled, the entire bed looks messy.
- The **loose sheets** and blankets in the middle represent the fat layer. They provide bulk and fullness...and keep you warm.
- The **bedspread** represents the skin. It is the visible outer covering that ultimately reflects what's happening underneath. It is easy to "smooth" out the bed spread only if the inner 2 layers are properly addressed.

Consider the accuracy of this analogy:

- When making a bed, you don't fix a loose fitted sheet by piling on more blankets.
- Likewise, you don't correct significant facial sagging by simply adding more filler.

Why Facelifts and Fillers Are Different

- A facelift is the only facial rejuvenation procedure that directly addresses all 3 layers.
- It repositions and tightens the SMAS and platysma.
- It allows restoration of volume where volume has been lost.
- It redrapes and smooths the skin.
- In other words, it addresses the structural foundation, the volume layer, and the skin envelope.

But that doesn't mean that simply addressing the volume layer with injectable fillers is a bad thing. When used appropriately with honest expectations, volume restoration can be incredibly effective.

Strategically placed filler can restore youthful contours, soften hollows, improve facial balance, and help patients look more rested and refreshed.



==> But do not expect a LIFT!

Broadly Speaking, Fillers Fall into Two Categories:

1. Traditional Fillers

These are products such as hyaluronic acid fillers that provide immediate volume and gradually dissolve over time.

Examples include:

- Juvederm®
- Restylane®
- RHA®
- Belotero®

These are great first steps for patients to sample fillers. If the results are not acceptable, they dissipate in 3 to 6 months. If the results are good, patients can repeat the treatments or take the next step which would be the longer lasting "Collagen-Stimulating" fillers.

2. Collagen-Stimulating Fillers

Rather than simply occupying space, these products stimulate your body's own collagen-producing cells to gradually create new collagen over time.

The result is often more subtle, longer-lasting, and potentially more natural than simply adding volume alone.

And that brings us to the real topic of today's newsletter:

The New Era of Injectable Collagen Stimulation

Over the last several years, injectable collagen stimulators have become one of the most exciting developments in aesthetic medicine.

Rather than acting as temporary space-occupying fillers, these products encourage your body to rebuild one of the very substances lost during aging—collagen itself.

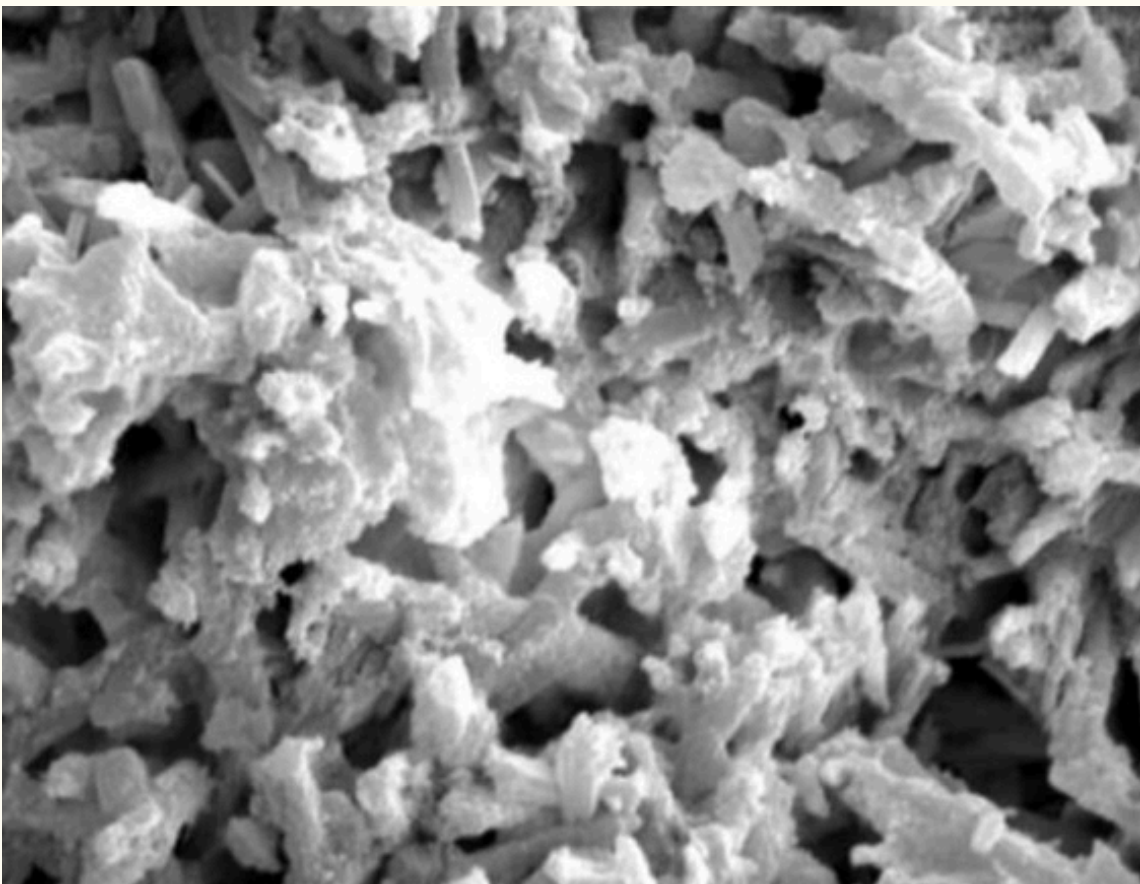
In the remainder of this newsletter, we'll explore how these products work, who makes a good candidate, and why collagen stimulation is rapidly changing the conversation around facial rejuvenation.

The top Collagen-Stimulating therapies include:

- Radiesse
- Sculptra
- Ariessance
- Platelet-Rich Plasma
- "Pure Brilliance"

1. Radiesse

Active ingredient: Calcium hydroxylapatite (CaHA) => the primary mineral component of human bone and teeth.



How it works

- Initially acts as a filler because the gel carrier provides immediate volume.
- Over weeks to months the gel dissipates.
- The CaHA microspheres remain and stimulate fibroblasts.
- Fibroblasts produce new collagen, elastin, and extracellular matrix.
- Also appears to stimulate angiogenesis (new blood vessel formation).

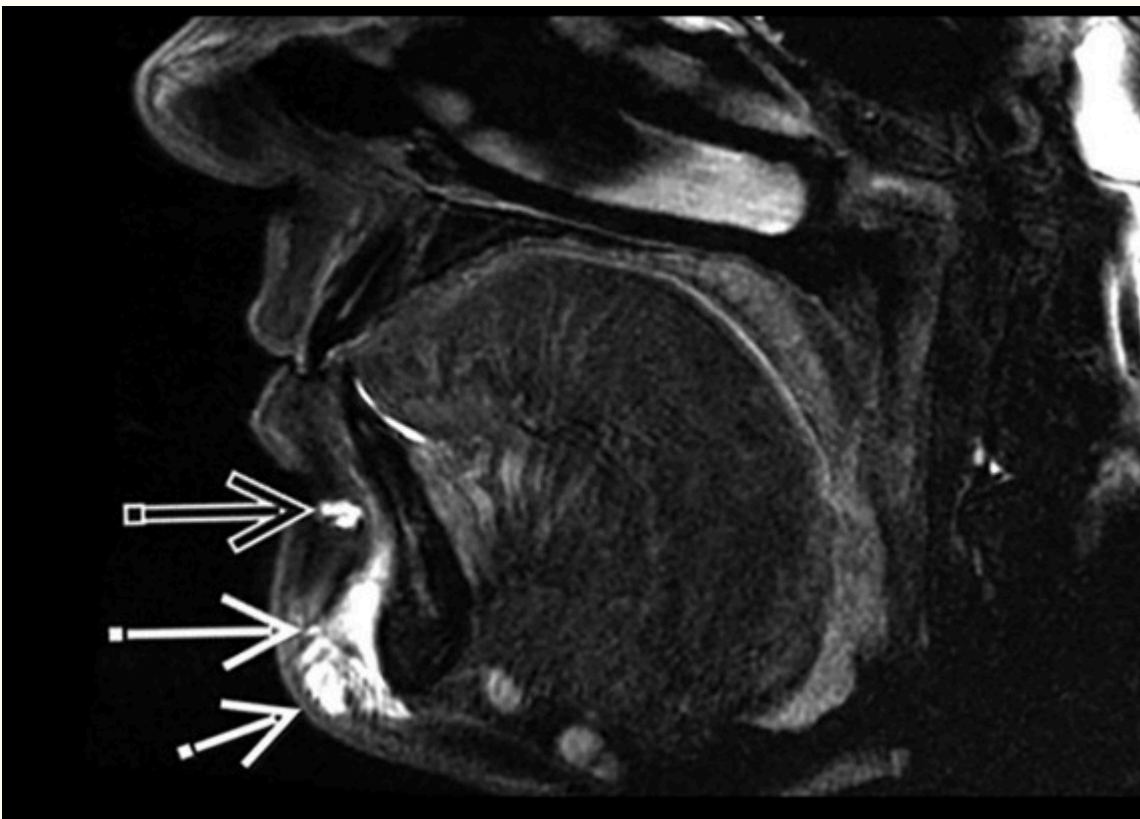
Timeline

- Immediate volume.
- Collagen production begins within weeks.
- Results often last 12–18 months or longer.

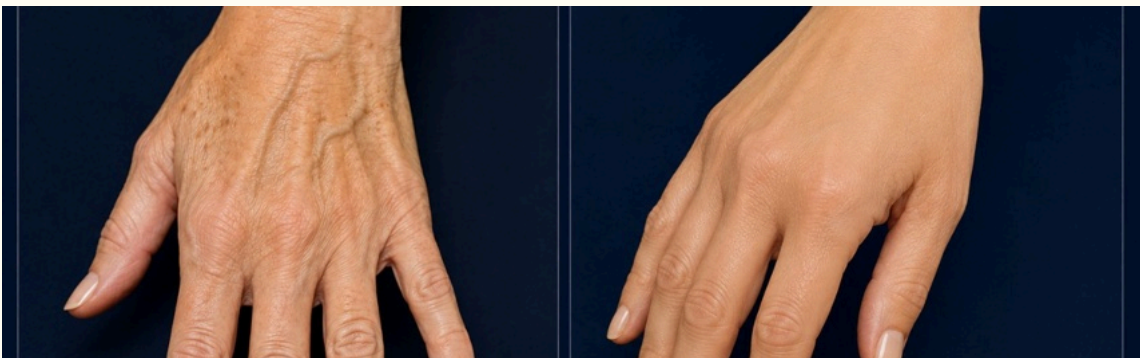
Best uses

- Jawline
- Chin
- Lower face
- Hands

MRI Scan showing Collagen production (arrows) in the chin after Radiesse injections:

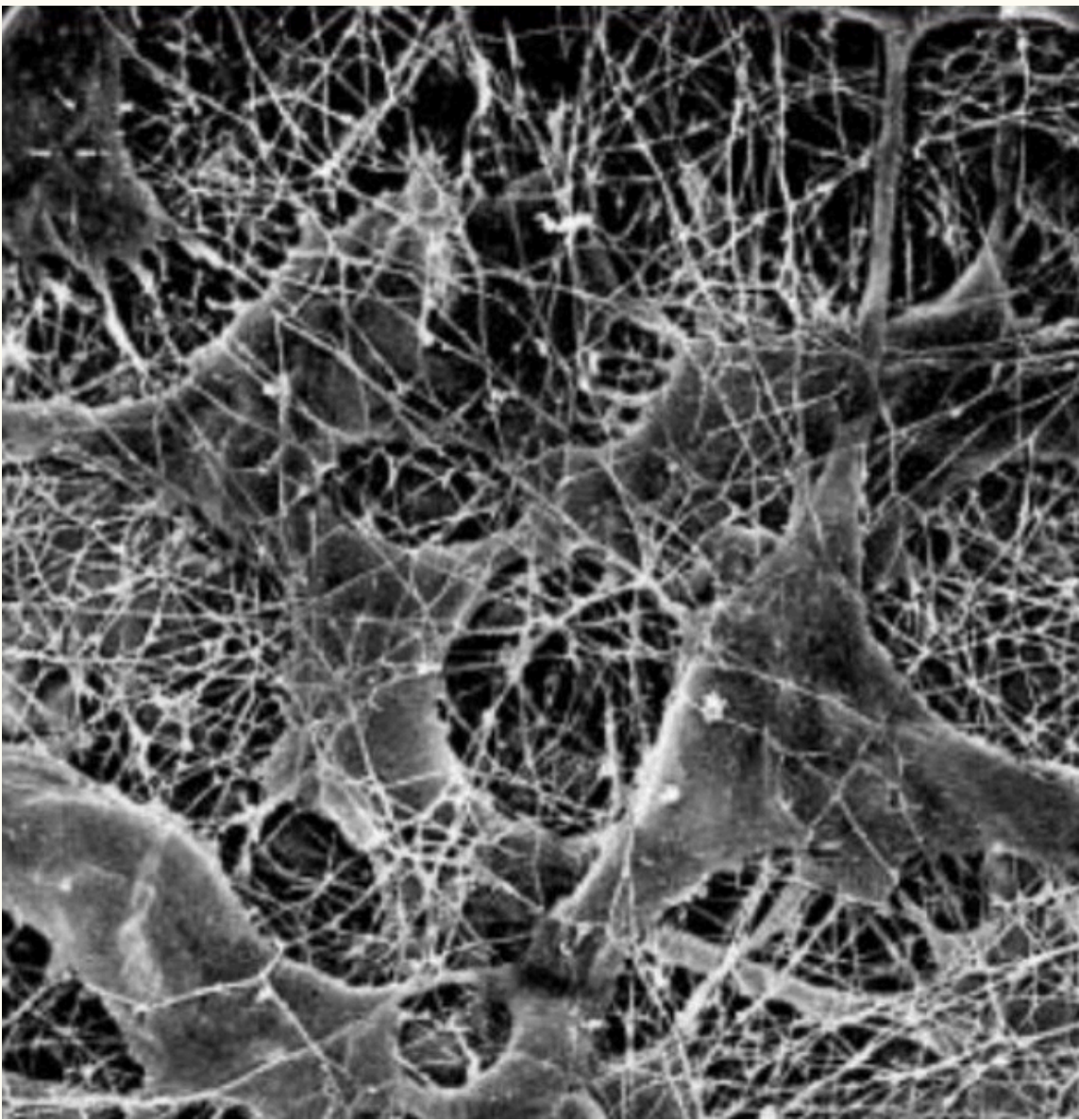


- Hyperdilute Radiesse for “plumping” of crepe skin of the neck, chest, arms, and abdomen



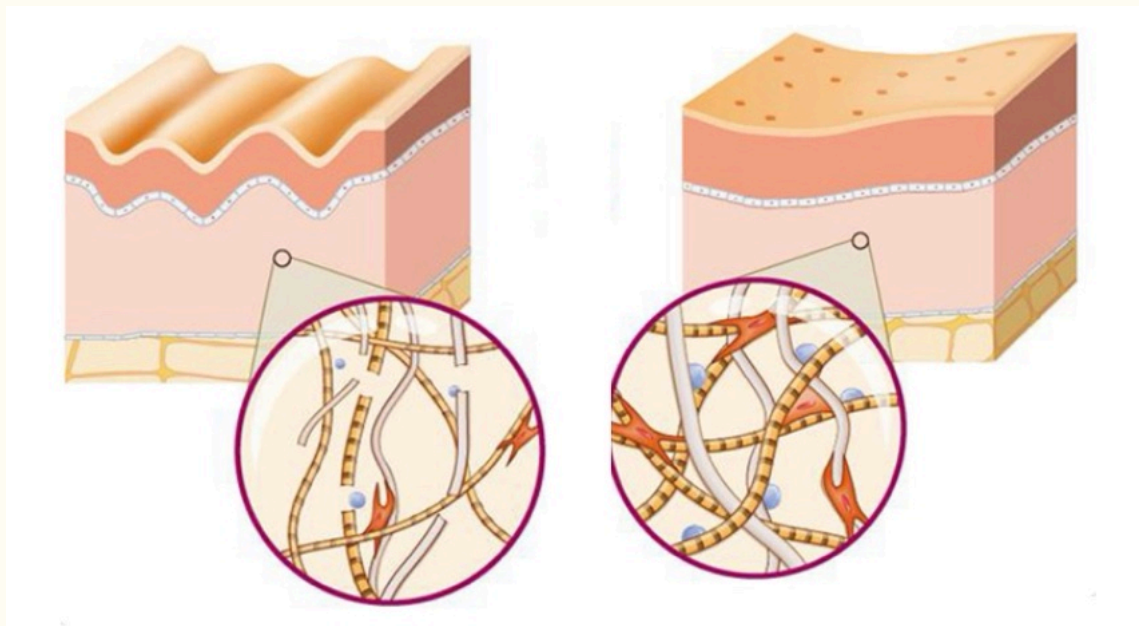
2. Sculptra

Active ingredient: Poly-L-lactic acid (PLLA) => a biodegradable synthetic polymer not naturally present in human tissues



How it works

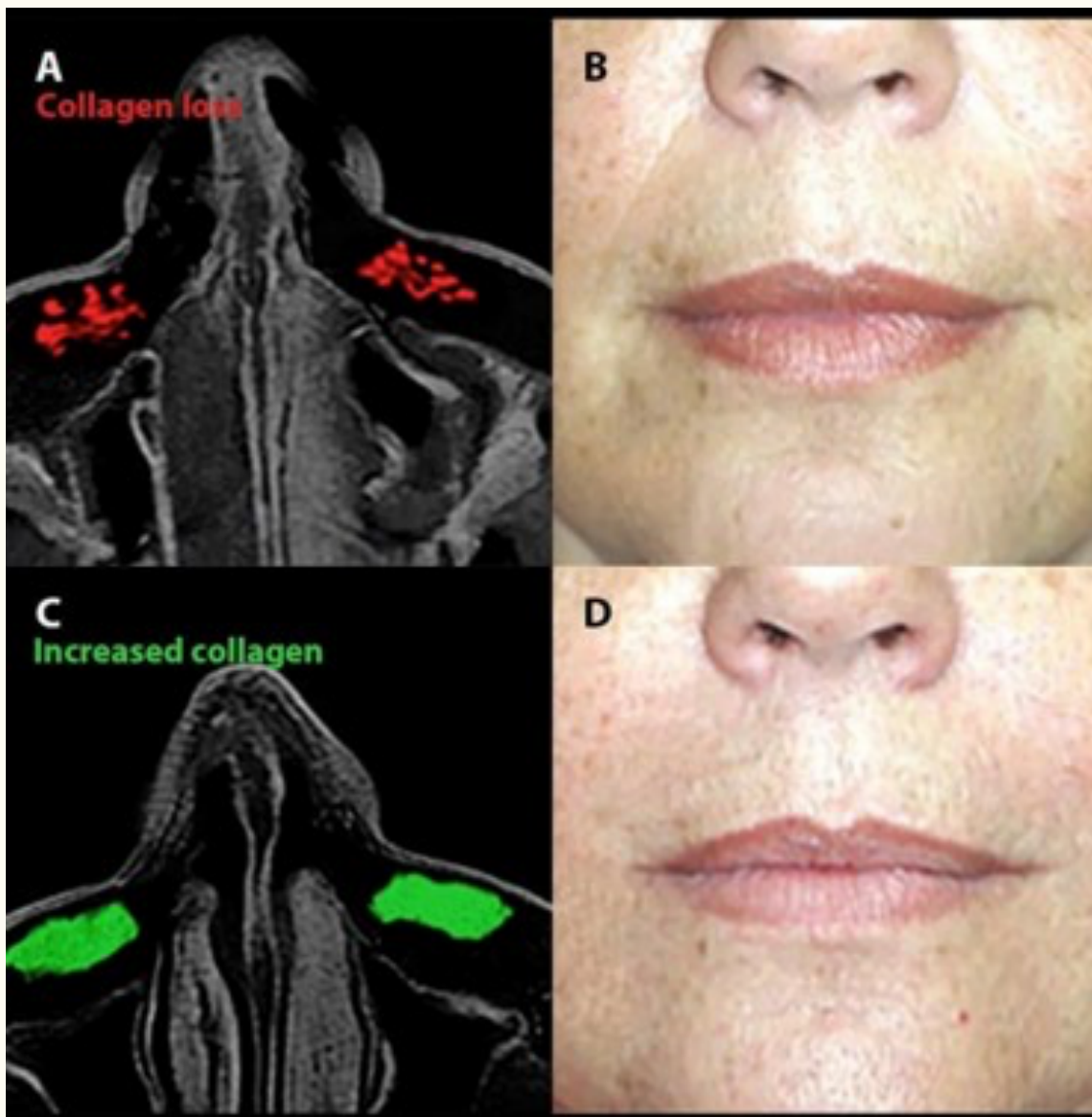
- PLLA particles are recognized as a foreign material.
- This creates a controlled inflammatory response.
- Macrophages and fibroblasts are recruited.
- Fibroblasts lay down new collagen around the PLLA particles.
- The PLLA gradually dissolves over months.



As Collagen builds deep in the skin, surface wrinkles smooth out to varying degrees.

Timeline

- Little immediate correction.
- Volume develops gradually over 2–6 months.
- Often requires multiple sessions.



MRI scan and actual patient before and after *Sculptra* injections into the cheek.

Red= zone of collagen loss with age

Green= collagen formation over 12 months after *Sculptra* injections

**notice the volume enhancement helps erase the cheek fold => this is not a “lifting” effect

Best uses

- Global facial volume loss
- Temples
- Midface
- Pre-jowl region



Key point

Sculptra is primarily a **collagen stimulator**, not a true filler. The volume you see later is largely your own newly formed collagen.

3. Ariessence (Pure PDGF+)

Active ingredient: Recombinant platelet-derived growth factor (PDGF-BB)

- Does not come from human blood, platelets, placentas, amniotic tissue, or stem cells.
- Scientists insert the human gene that codes for PDGF-BB into cultured cells, which then manufacture an identical copy of the growth factor.

How it works

PDGF is one of the body's major wound-healing signals.

When injected:

- Activates fibroblasts
- Stimulates collagen production
- Stimulates elastin production
- Improves tissue repair
- Enhances angiogenesis
- Improves skin thickness and quality

Best uses

- Under-eye rejuvenation
- Crepey skin
- Fine wrinkles
- Scar remodeling
- Hair restoration protocols



Key point

Think of Ariessence as a **targeted growth factor** injection rather than a filler. It is trying to improve tissue quality rather than create volume.

4. PRP (Platelet-Rich Plasma)

Active ingredient: Your own platelets

How it works

1. Blood is drawn.
2. Centrifuged.
3. Platelets are concentrated.
4. Platelets release growth factors:
 - PDGF - **Platelet-Derived Growth Factor**
 - VEGF - **Vascular Endothelial Growth Factor**
 - TGF- β - **Transforming Growth Factor Beta**
 - EGF - **Epidermal Growth Factor**
 - IGF-1 - **Insulin-Like Growth Factor 1**

These growth factors:

- Stimulate fibroblasts
- Increase collagen production
- Promote angiogenesis
- Accelerate tissue healing

Best uses

- Under eyes
- Hair restoration
- Microneedling
- Scar treatment
- Skin quality improvement



Limitation

Results can vary significantly because platelet concentration differs from patient to patient.

5. Pure Brilliance

“Pure Brilliance” is not a traditional injectable filler like Sculptra or Radiesse. It is a regenerative skin-boosting treatment protocol delivered into the skin through **Microneedling** that combines:

1. PDRN (Polydeoxyribonucleotide) – Derived from purified salmon DNA fragments, PDRN supports tissue repair, reduces inflammation, enhances microcirculation, and promotes healthier, more resilient skin.
2. PDO Particles (Polydioxanone) – Microscopic PDO particles stimulate fibroblast activity and encourage the gradual production of new collagen, helping to improve skin firmness and thickness over time.
3. Hyaluronic Acid (HA) – Provides deep hydration, improves moisture retention, and creates a smoother, plumper appearance.



What Patients Typically Notice

Most patients experience progressive improvements in skin quality over the weeks following treatment, including:

- Smoother skin texture
- Improved hydration and skin plumpness
- Enhanced radiance and luminosity ("glass skin" effect)
- Reduction in crepey or thin skin
- Decreased redness and inflammation
- Gradual collagen stimulation and skin rejuvenation

It may improve:

- Crepey lower eyelid skin
- Fine lines
- Thin skin quality
- Overall brightness



But it will not produce the volumizing effect seen with PRP gel, microfat grafting, HA filler, or Ariessence PDGF treatments.

Why Microneedling Matters

The microneedling itself is actually a major part of the treatment.

The needles create thousands of microchannels that:

- Trigger wound-healing cascades.
- Release growth factors.
- Activate fibroblasts.

- Increase collagen types I and III.

When PDRN, PDO particles, and HA are applied during the procedure, those channels may facilitate deeper delivery into the superficial dermis where the regenerative response occurs.

Best uses

- Under eyes
- Fine wrinkles
- Skin quality
- Hair restoration

What Can Go Wrong?

Collagen-stimulating fillers such as Sculptra and Radiesse have excellent safety profiles when used appropriately, but their complications differ somewhat from traditional hyaluronic acid fillers because they stimulate a biologic tissue response.

With my over 26 years of having performed many corrective facial surgeries, I have seen some really difficult to fix complications from these collagen-building fillers. This underscores the importance of having anything that is long-lasting, or even permanent, injected under the supervision of a Board-Certified Plastic Surgeon with years of experience managing unwanted side effects. Often these complications require facial surgery to correct.

Common Temporary Side Effects

- Swelling
- Bruising
- Tenderness
- Redness
- Itching
- Firmness at injection sites

These usually resolve within days to a few weeks.

Nodules and Lumps

This is the complication most often associated with Sculptra.

Sculptra

- Palpable nodules under the skin
- Visible lumps if placed too superficially
- Delayed onset (months to years after treatment)
- More common with inadequate dilution, poor massage, or superficial injection

Radiesse

- Can also cause nodules
- More likely when injected into thin skin such as the lower eyelid
- May be visible as whitish discoloration if placed too superficially

Vascular Occlusion

Although less common than with HA fillers, both products can cause:

- Arterial obstruction
- Skin necrosis
- Blindness
- Stroke (extremely rare)

This occurs when filler enters an artery or compresses a vessel.

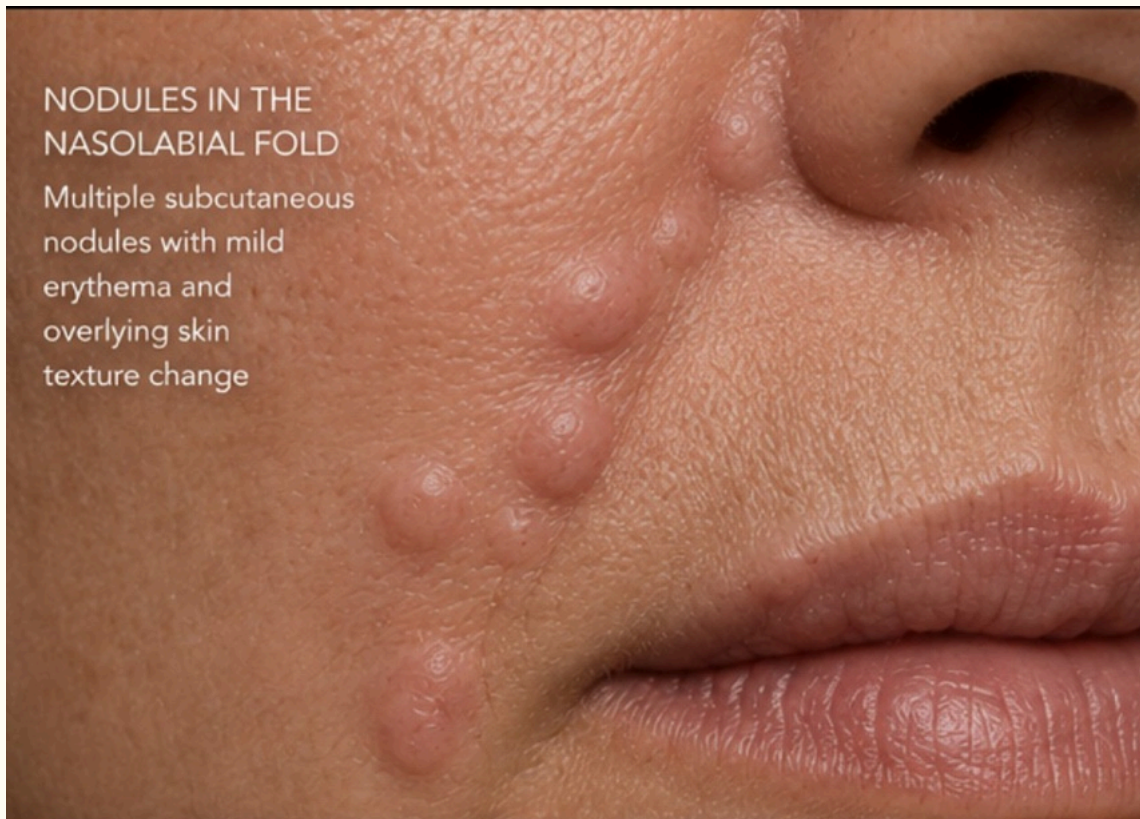
Important distinction:

- HA fillers can often be dissolved with hyaluronidase.
- Sculptra and Radiesse cannot be dissolved.

This makes prevention especially important....Again, use an experienced nurse injector working under the supervision of a Plastic Surgeon.

Inflammatory Reactions

- Delayed inflammatory nodules
- Foreign-body granulomas
- Chronic swelling
- Biofilm-associated inflammation



These reactions can occur months or even years after treatment. They are a nuisance, do not go away on their own, are often visible as lumps of the skin's

surface, and require meticulous surgery to remove.

Overcorrection

Because collagen develops gradually:

- Patients may appear under-corrected initially
- Excessive treatment can lead to overcorrection months later
- Volume accumulation may become apparent only after collagen forms

Migration

Less common than with some HA fillers but possible:

- Product may shift from the original injection site
- Can create contour irregularities

Lower Eyelid Complications

Particularly relevant in facial aesthetic practice:

- Visible nodules
- Tyndall-like appearance => a “bluish” discoloration of the skin
- Edema
- Irregular contours
- Prolonged swelling

This is why many injectors avoid Sculptra and Radiesse directly in the tear trough area of the “thin-skinned” lower eyelids..

Infection

Rare but possible:

- Cellulitis
- Abscess formation
- Biofilm infections

Risk increases with poor sterile technique.

Calcification

Rarely reported with Radiesse:

- Persistent palpable firmness
- Radiographic calcification-like appearance
- May complicate future imaging interpretation

Areas of Highest Risk

- Glabella
- Nose
- Temple
- Nasolabial fold
- Tear trough
- Forehead

These regions contain vessels connected to the ophthalmic circulation and require particular caution.

Long-Term Considerations

The biggest advantage of collagen stimulators is longevity, but this is also their biggest drawback when complications occur:

- Results cannot be rapidly reversed.
- Nodules may require steroids, 5-FU, laser treatment, or surgical excision.
- Vascular events are more difficult to manage than with HA fillers.

For facial rejuvenation in 2026, the biggest trend is moving away from simply adding volume and toward **biostimulation and tissue regeneration**—using products that improve the quality of the skin, fat, and connective tissue rather than just filling space.

SPECIAL PROMO:

Receive 10% OFF Collagen Stimulating
Products!

Offer expires July 10, 2026.

Call to Schedule!

STAY TUNED!

Be on the lookout for next week's newsletter, "*Estrogen Replacement Therapy: Why Can't Your Doctor Get it*"

Right?"

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