

Evaluation of Eyelid Function and Aesthetics



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KEYWORDS

• Aesthetics • Face • Beauty • Aging/physiology • Eyelids/surgery • Preoperative evaluation

KEY POINTS

- The eyes and periocular area are the central aesthetic unit of the face.
- Facial aging is a dynamic process that involves skin, subcutaneous soft tissues, and bony structures.
- An understanding of what is perceived as youthful and beautiful is critical for success.
- Knowledge of the functional aspects of the eyelid and periocular area can identify preoperative red flags.

INTRODUCTION

The beauty of a woman must be seen from in her eyes, because that is the doorway to her heart, the place where love resides

Audrey Hepburn

Appearance has an important role in self-perception as well as perception by others. No area is more important in self-perception than the face, which research has shown to have a profound effect on overall well-being.^{1,2} As the center of the face, the functional and aesthetic importance of the periocular region cannot be overstated. Not only is the periocular area the core aesthetic unit of the face, it is also responsible for protection and function of the eye and thus the visual system. Periorbital aging changes are among the earliest to present in the face, which can cause patients distress with even small changes to this area.^{3,4}

Patient attention to the periorbital region has driven cosmetic blepharoplasty to become one of most commonly performed surgical procedures

in the world.⁵ Although complication rates with periorbital aesthetic treatments are generally low, visually threatening events can occur. Given the intricate relationship of the periorbital area with the visual system, an intimate understanding of anatomy combined with a thorough preoperative evaluation and meticulous surgical technique are essential to provide the highest patient outcomes.^{6,7} The preoperative evaluation is crucial to assessing patient goals, establishing the surgical plan, setting realistic expectations, and identifying any risk factors that could lead to poor outcomes. The following is our standard approach to evaluating the functional and aesthetic issues in the periorbital area.

THE BEAUTIFUL EYE

Symmetry

Symmetry is of paramount importance in the perception of facial beauty.^{8,9} Humans have a sensitive perception of symmetry, the ability to detect perfect symmetry, and to discern very small amounts of asymmetry. The correlation between

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symmetry and attractiveness is significant,^{10–12} with studies finding digitalized mirror-image faces perceived as more attractive than the unaltered original images.¹³ Thus, the importance of symmetry to oculofacial plastic surgeons cannot be overstated.

The periocular region frequently has visible asymmetry in the brow, eyelid height, amount of skin redundancy, cheek projection, and globe prominence. Although there is no general consensus on the amount of asymmetry that is clinically significant, previous studies have found significant asymmetry in up to 30% of patients.^{8,14} Many patients are unaware of their asymmetries, which leads to poor surgical outcomes if not addressed properly addressed at surgery.¹⁵ Surgeons must review with their patients, document all asymmetry, and factor its role into the treatment plan. Patients must be counseled that at least a small degree of asymmetry will persist postoperatively. Unrealistic expectations can lead to marked patient dissatisfaction.¹⁶

Aging

Ideally, balanced and diffuse fat distribution, a well-rounded three-dimensional structure, and good projection are hallmarks of a healthy and youthful facial appearance.¹⁷ Little¹⁸ described the youthful face as an ogee-shaped profile, with anterior oblique surfaces that undulate in graceful curves.

Facial aging is a dynamic process that involves skin, subcutaneous soft tissues, and bony structures. The bony remodeling of the orbit results in

orbital elongation, loss of projection, and change of the bone–soft tissue relationship (**Fig. 1**), which likely contributes to the fat prolapse, hollow sulci, ptosis, brow descent, and lateral upper eyelid hooding that is commonly seen in aging.^{4,19} The skin and subcutaneous tissues around the periocular area become increasingly hollow, allowing the underlying bone, muscle, remaining fat, and blood vessels to become more apparent.¹⁷ The gradual descent and atrophy of subcutaneous tissue alters the smooth ogee curve of the youthful face.¹⁸

Older surgical techniques for periocular rejuvenation are generally purely subtractive, with the removal of fat and skin, which led to an increasing hollow appearance. However, the increased understanding of the aging process has resulted in the amelioration and development of new techniques leading to more successful rejuvenation outcomes.^{20–22}

SKIN

Skin is the largest organ in the human body. Healthy skin tone, a smooth appearance, and brighter complexion are associated with increased attractiveness, youth, and health.²³ Because wrinkles are a sign of aging, youthful skin should be smooth. Ideally, the pigment is uniform and skin is free of blemishes with a consistent appearance (**Fig. 2**).^{24,25}

UPPER EYELID

The upper eyelid margin naturally has a gently curved contour. Medially, the curve has a sharper

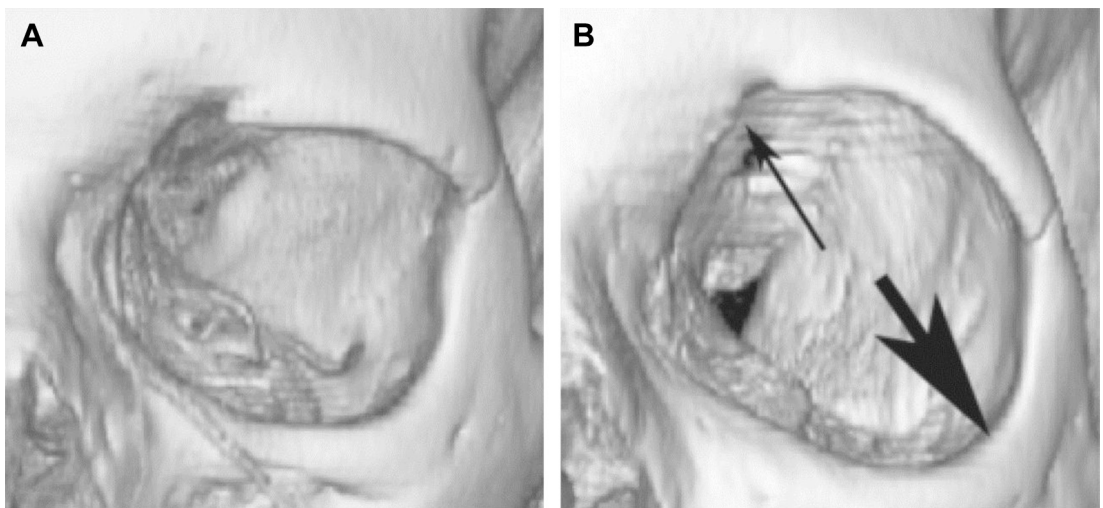


Fig. 1. Computed tomography scan of a male patient in the young age group (A) and a male patient in the old age group (B). The image from the old age groups shows significant bony remodeling (arrows) both superomedially and inferolaterally. (From Kahn DM, Shaw RB Jr. Aging of the bony orbit: a three-dimensional computed tomographic study. *Aesthet Surg J* 2008;28:258–64; with permission.)

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