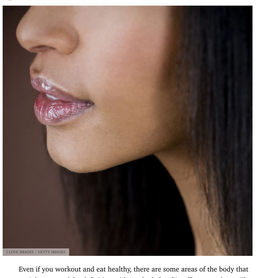
Everything You've Ever Wanted to Know About Ultherapy

This noninvasive treatment lifts and tightens your jawline without needles or scalpels.

BY KRISTINA RODULFO OCT 31, 2019



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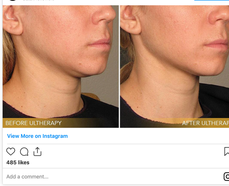
Even if you workout and eat healthy, there are some areas of the body that can't be targeted for definition without the help of in-office procedures. The submental area (aka the jawline and neck) is one of them.

"The fat pocket under the chin is pretty weight loss-resistant for most people," says David Colbert, MD, founder and head physician of the New York Dermatology Group. "If someone's always been fit, but they have sort of a little fat pad under the chin, it's not going to go away with diet."

One way you can achieve slimming, tightening, and lifting is through Ultherapy, a noninvasive way to firm areas like the chin, neck, brow, and décolleté. It's based on the same technology used in radiology for ultrasound imaging (i.e. during pregnancy): The machine uses sound wave energy go through your skin to penetrate the muscle of the area you're treating. The machine has multiple attachments used to allow for superficial, medium, and deep penetration. It causes the muscle to contract and shrink, which aesthetically results in a firming, wrinkle-smoothing, and contouring effect.

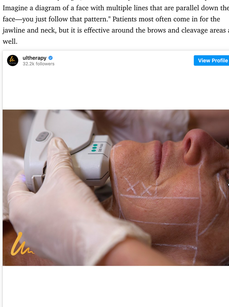


"It's one of our most popular procedures because it's pretty simple to do. There's no cutting—you get up and walk out," Dr. Colbert says. He adds that, despite being approved by the FDA for noninvasive lifting back in 2009, he has seen a recent uptick in procedures equally across sexes. Why? He says "there is absolutely no doubt" part of the reason is social media turning everyone selfie-conscious. After all, a strong jawline is flattering at every angle.

Whatever reason you're interested in Ultherapy, here's exactly what to expect.

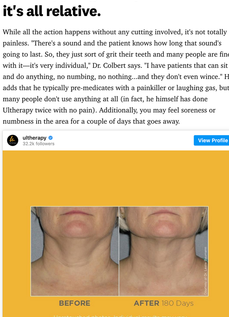
The procedure takes around 45 minutes to one hour and there is no downtime.

It involves first applying ultrasound gel, then going over the treatment area in three passes at different depths: two millimeters and three and a half millimeters. "The deeper you go, the deeper you are into the muscle, the more contraction you get," Dr. Colbert says. "We do it in a certain pattern. Imagine a diagram of a face with multiple lines that are parallel down the face—you just follow that pattern." Patients most often come in for the jawline and neck, but it is effective around the brows and cleavage areas as well.



Ultherapy might be painful—but it's all relative.

While all the action happens without any cutting involved, it's not totally painless. "There's a sound and the patient knows how long that sound's going to last. So, they just sort of grit their teeth and many people are fine with it—it's very individual," Dr. Colbert says. "I have patients that can sit and do anything, no numbing, no nothing...and they don't even wince." He adds that he typically pre-medicates with a painkiller or laughing gas, but many people don't use anything at all (in fact, he himself has done Ultherapy twice with no pain). Additionally, you may feel soreness or numbness in the area for a couple of days that goes away.

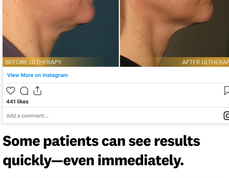


You only need one session for results, and it lasts for a year.

Dr. Colbert explains: "Every once in a while, I'll allow someone to do it in stages if they don't like the procedure. We'll do the superficial depth one day and the deeper pass another." If you want, you can come back in six months for an extra pass but it can be done once a year or once every two years for maintenance. "It also depends on what age you are and how you respond," he adds.

Ultherapy comes at a four-figure cost.

At Dr. Colbert's practice in New York City, Ultherapy for full face and neck costs $5,000, lower face and neck costs $3,800, and décolleté costs $2,500. While that price can vary across different cities, you can expect the range to be four figures—at least you're only going in and paying for it once.



Some patients can see results quickly—even immediately.

This is particularly true if you're someone with sagging skin or jowls, Dr. Colbert says. Ultherapy works because it triggers the creation of new collagen by inflicting thermal injury. "Collagen rebuilds itself and continues to grow for about three months and then it plateaus off," he says. "Some people might not see the results right away, but by two to three months you should see full results."

Ultherapy is not preventative.

"You wouldn't come in with a perfect face in your twenties or thirties," Dr. Colbert says. "A lot of people do that, but there's no real indication for it. It isn't that kind of preventative."

It can be combined with other procedures for even better results.

"Sometimes people will have a deposit of fat under their chin so they don't have a really clear cut jawline," Dr. Colbert explains, adding that he could get even stronger definition by doing CoolSculpt, Sculpsure, or Kybella to "freeze, dissolve, or destroy fat cells then later apply the Ulthera to tighten them."

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Kristina Rodulfo is the Beauty Director of Women's Health—she oversees beauty coverage across print and digital and is an expert in product testing, identifying trends, and exploring the intersections of beauty, wellness, and culture.