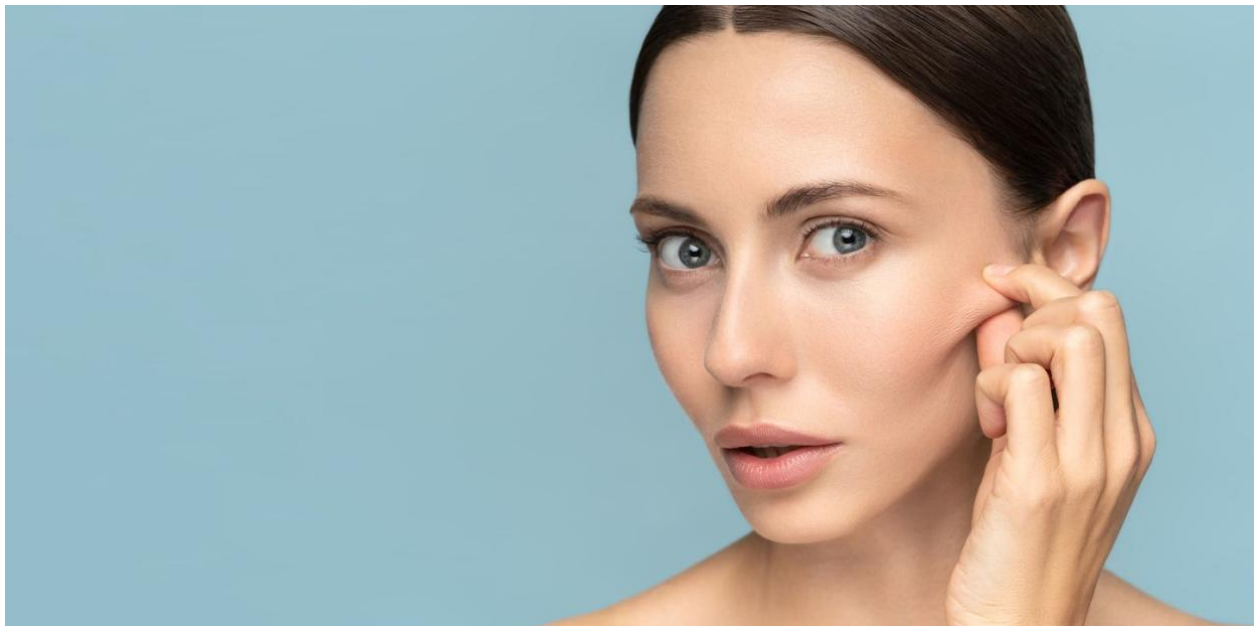


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What Is Buccal Fat And Why Is Everyone Obsessed With Removing It?



These days, you can never really guess what kinds of unusual beauty topics will start to trend on social media and why. Since 2020, all kinds of trendy cosmetic and plastic surgery procedures have been at the center of discourse on the apps: the Brazilian butt lift (and the potential dangers associated with it) has been hotly debated since becoming one of the most sought-after surgeries in 2019 and 2020; the minimally-invasive "lip flip" slowly took over TikTok in early 2022; and now, the most recent procedure to have its moment in the spotlight is buccal fat removal.

Meet Our Experts: Dr. Heather Lee, MD, board-certified facial plastic surgeon from Quatela Center for Plastic Surgery in Rochester, NY, Dr. Michael Horn, MD, board-certified plastic surgeon at Lake Shore Plastic Surgery in Chicago

Lately, social media has been buzzing with photos of a handful of celebrities with seemingly slimmer faces and more chiseled jawlines. Many people have assumed (without confirmation) that these changes are the result of buccal fat removal—a procedure in which fat in the cheeks and jaw area is removed to give the face a more contoured appearance—which is likely why you've been seeing the term all over your timeline.

If this has only made you more curious about what buccal fat is, why someone would want it removed, and why the heck everyone is talking about it, we reached out to a few experts to clear things up.

What is buccal fat anyway?

In short, buccal fat (pronounced “buckle”) is just the fat that lies between your cheekbone and jawbone. **“Everyone has a buccal fat pad in their cheek hollow area,” says Michael Horn, MD, a board-certified plastic surgeon at Lake Shore Plastic Surgery in Chicago. “The size varies from person to person, and one cheek’s pad may be larger than the other.”**

Dr. Horn explains that even though skin with a full and plump appearance has become trendy because of its association with youth, some people—like Chrissy Teigen, who admitted to having the procedure done back in 2021—may opt to have their buccal fat removed if they find that if the area is too full.

“There’s been a significant increase in the interest around buccal fat removal in younger patients who are looking to change the contour and slim the lower part of their face,” says board-certified facial plastic surgeon Heather Lee, MD.

Basically, the purpose of removing buccal fat is to slim the cheeks. “Picture pursing your lips together and biting down with both cheeks on the thick skin inside the mouth to give yourself a facsimile of what buccal fat removal will do,” says Dr. Horn.

What happens during a buccal fat removal procedure?

The first thing you need to know is that the entire procedure takes less than an hour, according to Dr. Horn, and you should expect to be sedated or put under general anesthesia. “The procedure involves an incision inside the mouth on the inner area of the cheek,” Dr. Horn explains. “Once the fat is removed from each side, a surgeon closes the incisions with sutures.”

Dr. Lee adds that the procedure has to be done very carefully in order to avoid injuring nerves that control movement of the face, as well as your salivary duct.

“The goal is to create a slimmer lower face and to accentuate the cheek bones and jawline,” she explains. “By removing fullness in the cheek area, the contours of the face are highlighted and the roundness of the face is lessened.”

What is the recovery time like?

After your removal procedure, your surgeon should give you an oral rinse to prevent infection, though you might also be prescribed antibiotics to further minimize your risk. Additionally, you'll likely experience bruising, swelling, and discomfort in your cheeks for up to two weeks after surgery.

“A liquid diet is recommended for a few days post-op, and patients progress to soft foods as the soreness alleviates,” Dr. Horn says. “Ice packs can be used to relieve this.” Because of the swelling, it’s possible that it may take up to three weeks for you to actually see results.

Are there any risks associated with buccal fat removal?

As stated before by Dr. Lee, this surgery could temporarily or permanently injure some of the nerves that control your face and salivary duct if performed incorrectly. As with any surgery, you should also do your research to ensure that your surgeon doesn't remove too much fat and make your face look too gaunt.

“Since it does not regrow, there is a risk of removing too much fat and creating excessive hollowing,” Dr. Lee says. “Although that may be what some younger patients are looking for, this can have major implications as they age.”

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