

VENICE PLASTIC SURGERY

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Cosmetic, Reconstructive, Face, Breast, and Hand Surgery

Wounds and Healing - The effects of aging

Patients come to the clinic with wounds that have not healed for several months. They tell me they do not understand why healing is slower than in the past. It seems that the general belief is that healthy people should remain in perfect health and then suddenly die. This may sound good but it is not the way it works.

I tell patients that we are basically born perfect and from there it is all down hill. I believe the body is designed to last a hundred years. If you inherit diseases from your parents or abuse your body you can only accelerate ageing and decrease your life expectancy. There is no way I know to stop the aging process. However, with cosmetic plastic surgical procedures one may be able to reduce the outward appearance of ageing.

My concept of healing in the older population is that at age 50 healing takes twice as long as when you were born. At 75 it takes four times longer. Surgical procedures have been performed in utero, before the person is even born. These wounds heal fastest and almost without scarring. At age fifty one might say that the human heart has only 50 percent capacity. The circulation to your legs is half what it once was. Muscle tissue is replaced by fat. Bones thin and weaken. Joints wear out. The skin becomes less elastic and thins with aging. It is less durable and bruises more easily. These result in more injuries with only minimal trauma.

I walk around the kitchen and occasionally bump into the open dishwasher door. No injury results. Yet it seems that every week a patient comes to the clinic with a non-healing wound from a brush against the dishwasher, or the coffee table, the bed post, the car door, the cart at the grocery store. The reason is that the skin durability is not what it used to be.

How about the sun. Life long exposure to solar radiation also damages skin. People occasionally insist that they expose wounds to the sun. This can only hurt the wound. Taking certain medicines as steroids for arthritis or breathing problems further thins the skin. As it turns out many older people are on medicines that thin the skin and thin the blood. These may be life saving medicines but the side effects over time may be to weaken the skin.

Your immune system, the body defense against infection and disease, weakens with time. Your body can no longer fight off the small dose of bacteria to which the wound was exposed. The bacteria invade and result in infection that would not have occurred at your earlier age. A small wound turns into a big one.

So what do I advise? Be more careful now, wear protective clothing. Do not take chances, let some youngster fix it for you. When a wound develops go see your doctor sooner. Wounds turn into big ones quickly now and recovery is slower. Make sure you understand the side effects of the medicines you are now taking.

**The above represents the opinion of A. E. Haas, M.D.
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Just call us directly. No referral needed unless required by your insurance company

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