

Peer Pressure

Heavy, overhanging eyelids can restrict peripheral vision and gradually reduce the amount of light that can enter the eyes. More than a cosmetic problem, ptosis is a medical condition requiring treatment by a skilled ophthalmologist.

“My eyelids were so heavy that they came down over my eyes like a roll-top desk,” describes 59-year-old “Herbie” Fossen with characteristic flair. “It’s a hereditary condition, and I wasn’t surprised to notice my eyelids starting to bulge a bit when I was in my forties.”

“I’m not particularly vain,” she explains, “so until my eyelids posed a problem with my vision, I just dealt with them the best way I could.”

For Herbie, a Medicare biller who works on a computer for a good part of the day, that meant raising her eyebrows to unusual heights to lift the skin of her eyelids when she needed to work at her keyboard. “I developed two lines above my eyebrows from doing that so long, so often,” she informs.

Her eyebrow exertions became so noticeable that her co-workers finally asked what she was doing. “If I don’t raise my eyebrows, my eyelids hang so low over my eyes that I can’t see,” she told them.

Another trick Herbie used was to prop her excess eyelid skin up with her fingers when all she had to do was read. “It didn’t really help,” she admits, “and even though my eyelids looked really gross, I didn’t think my insurance would cover surgery to correct the problem.”

Herbie frankly admits that finances kept her from considering eyelid surgery for more than a decade, because she knew that purely cosmetic procedures were not reimbursable.

Finally, though, Herbie realized that appearances were the least of the problems caused by her overhanging eyelids.

“I couldn’t read street signs very easily, and things seemed hard for me to see at work. I noticed, too, that the ‘ceiling’ of my vision was getting lower, and that my peripheral vision wasn’t any good,” describes Herbie.

Finding help

Herbie has been seeing board-certified ophthalmologist Ernest C. Skidmore, MD, of Community Eye Center in Port Charlotte, for her regular eye care for several years.

“I think so highly of Dr. Skidmore,” says Herbie, “especially since he never tried to coerce me into having surgery. He understood my financial concerns and respected my decision to cope as long as I could.”

“When I finally decided that my heavy eyelids were having too great an effect on my vision, I started asking people for recommendations to an eye surgeon. I kept hearing Dr. Skidmore, Dr. Skidmore, Dr. Skidmore. My own eye doctor! So I scheduled an appointment and asked him what we could do about my eyelids.”

What happens?

“Heavy, drooping eyelids are a common problem,” informs Dr. Skidmore.

He explains that folds and bags of excess skin form when the connective tissue of the eyelids is no longer able to hold the protective layer of fat in place around the eye, allowing the tissue to bulge forward. As the

skin loses its tone and elasticity, the condition worsens, and eventually, the excess skin protrudes into the field of view.

Dr. Skidmore notes that some people find themselves using their forehead muscles and even their fingers to lift the excess eyelid skin out of their field of view, just as Herbie did. The strain continually placed on the muscles in the forehead often leads to headaches, and many patients with overhanging lids also complain of eye strain.



Joseph W. Spadafora, DO
Eric R. Schaible, MD, FACS
Ernest C. Skidmore, MD
Jon K. Batzer, OD
Douglas E. Radish, OD
Jennifer Gallo, OD

“When the eyelids cause problems of this magnitude,” suggests Dr. Skidmore, “patients should consider consulting their ophthalmologist about eyelid surgery.”

“That surprises some people,” he acknowledges. “They often think of consulting a plastic surgeon for this type of operation. Eyelid surgery is a safe procedure,” assures Dr. Skidmore, “but any surgery has risks, and virtually all complications that follow eyelid surgery are eye complications. Ophthalmologists deal only with the eyes, and the structures

that surround them. We have the training to reduce the risks of eye complications and address any that may arise.”

Overhanging eyelids often pose a cosmetic problem for patients, giving them a tired, disinterested or even angry appearance, but Dr. Skidmore notes that overhanging eyelids like Herbie’s present safety problems aside from these cosmetic effects.

Excess eyelid tissue that obstructs the vision can actually make driving or walking a hazardous undertaking. Tissue that blocks peripheral vision can keep a driver from noticing a vehicle approaching from the side, or a pedestrian stepping off a curb. It can keep someone from noticing a low-hanging tree limb or other aerial obstruction.

“This can be a particular problem for older patients who may have arthritis that restricts their range of motion,” points out Dr. Skidmore. “If they are unable to turn far enough to see over their shoulders, peripheral vision becomes especially important.”

Fortunately, eyelid surgery offers an effective, minimally invasive solution to both cosmetic and functional problems.

“When eyelid surgery is a medically necessary procedure to restore the visual field, as it was for Herbie,” informs Dr. Skidmore, “Medicare and many insurance carriers will cover the cost of this surgery.”

Dr. Skidmore clarifies that coverage is usually extended only to surgery on the upper eyelids. “In most cases, heavy, bulging lower lids pose a purely cosmetic problem not covered by insurance,” he notes.

There are exceptions: if the lower lid becomes so heavy that it pulls away from the lower arc of the eye, the drooping lower eyelid can place the eye at increased

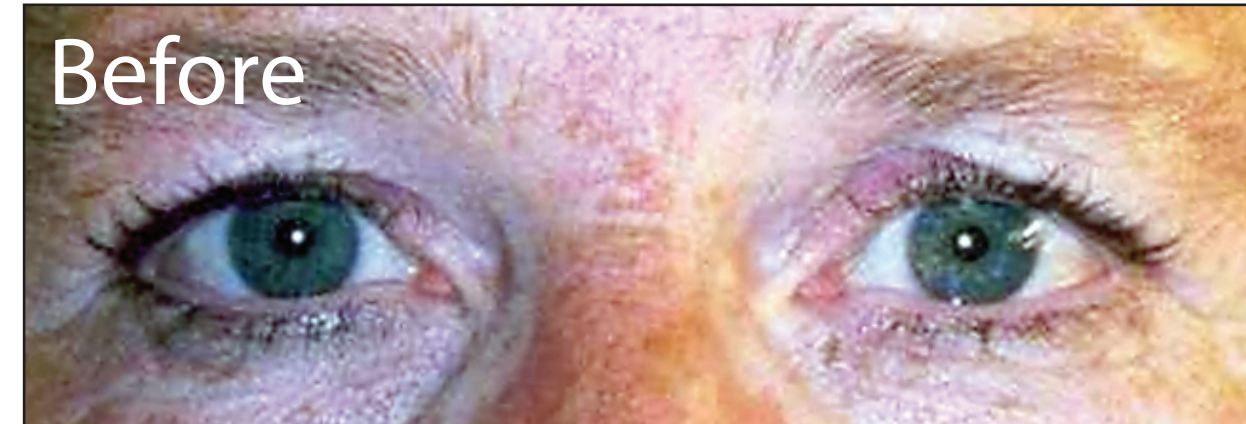
risk for infection or irritation. “In very rare cases, the fatty pads in the lower lids may fall so far forward that they cause the skin beneath the eyes to puff out so far that a patient’s eyeglasses become ineffectual,” adds Dr. Skidmore. “In cases like these, insurance companies may reconsider their denial of lower-eyelid blepharoplasty.”

While excision of the excess eyelid tissue is a good solution for heavy, overhanging upper eyelids, Dr. Skidmore reminds that serious consequences can result if too much skin is removed. “The eyelid may not close properly, even during sleep,” he cautions. “This can expose the eye to debris or infection, and in extreme cases can result in blindness.”

“Dry eye syndrome, corneal problems, diseases of the conjunctiva or of the eyelid, and inflammatory diseases of the eyelid all can be negatively affected by eyelid surgery,” he continues. “All of these special conditions are part of an ophthalmic surgeon’s daily fare, and provide strong arguments for consulting an ophthalmic surgeon in solving these problems.”

To reduce the chance of such complications following surgery, Dr. Skidmore employs more than the simple “pinch” technique to estimate the amount of

PHOTOS COURTESY OF COMMUNITY EYE CENTER



excess eyelid skin to be removed. The “overhanging estimation technique” allows him to make a more accurate assessment of redundant tissue so he can remove enough excess skin to solve the problem, with less risk of removing too much.

Straightforward

Dr. Skidmore reassures that eyelid surgery is a straightforward procedure: “Surgery on both upper eyelids or both lower eyelids can be performed with local anesthetic during a single operation that takes about an hour. The lids are numbed immediately prior to the surgery, preventing pain during or immediately after the procedure. A small incision is made along the natural lid crease, so that any slight remaining evidence of it is hidden in the natural folds of the skin.”

Following surgery, patients relax in the recovery room and are given easy-to-follow post-operative instructions before going home. These include directions to use a prescription eye ointment and apply cold compresses to ease any discomfort and reduce possible swelling, bruising and discoloration. Dr. Skidmore points out that this varies with the patient. “Some have no bruising at all,” he comments, “while others may have a little bleeding under the skin several hours later.”

Once the anesthetic wears off, approximately eight hours after the procedure, some patients may feel a little tightness in the area of the delicate incisions.

Any apparent swelling typically recedes during the first couple of days. Within a week, patients are pleased to look in the mirror and discover eyes that look brighter and more rested, and a field of view that is broader and unobstructed.

Excellent results

Herbie scheduled her surgery over the long Memorial Day holiday weekend, and only missed

two days of work while she followed Dr. Skidmore’s post-surgical instructions.

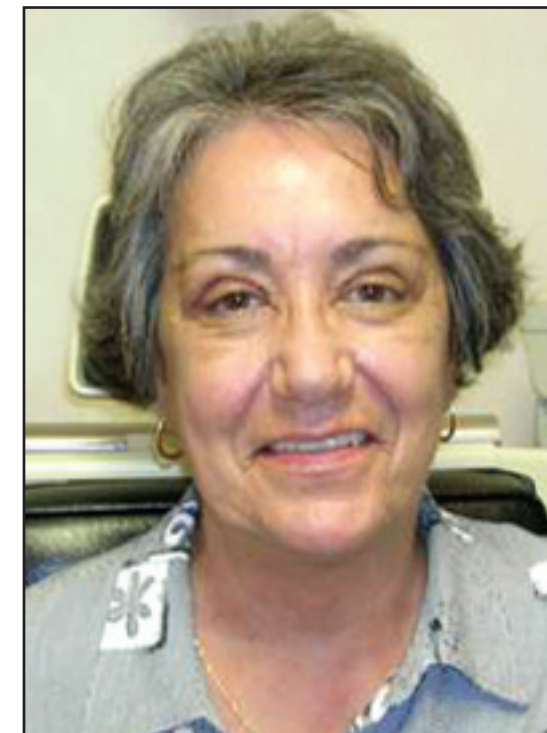
“I put this off for so long, but I am really glad I finally decided to have Dr. Skidmore solve this problem for me,” confirms Herbie. “My surgery wasn’t painful at all, and except for some tightness and a little itching where Dr. Skidmore placed the most delicate stitches, there wasn’t any post-surgical discomfort, either.”

“A day after my surgery I definitely felt better, and even without trying, I was amazed at the difference in my field of vision, both in my side vision and my overhead vision!”

“I have to laugh, too,” says Herbie, “because even in the first few days after my surgery, when I had some discoloration and swelling, I met an older lady who told me I looked like a movie star. I laughed, of course, but once the discoloration and puffiness went away, I looked in the mirror to see the results of Dr. Skidmore’s work.”

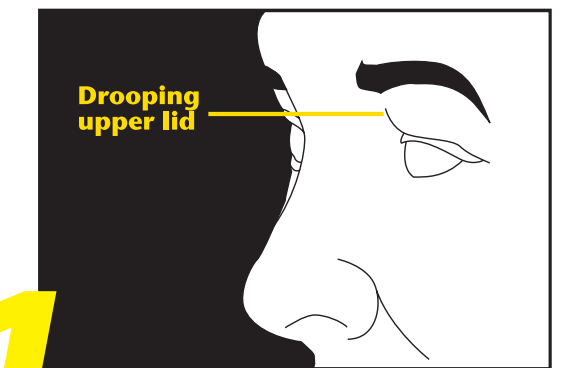
“Oh, my gosh,” says Herbie. “My eyes are beautiful!”

FNCH—Billie S. Noukas

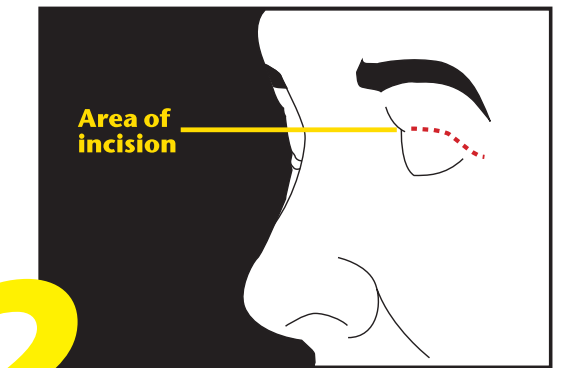


WIDE-EYED WONDER! Herbie’s view of the world is broadened and heightened, thanks to eyelid surgery skillfully performed by Dr. Skidmore.

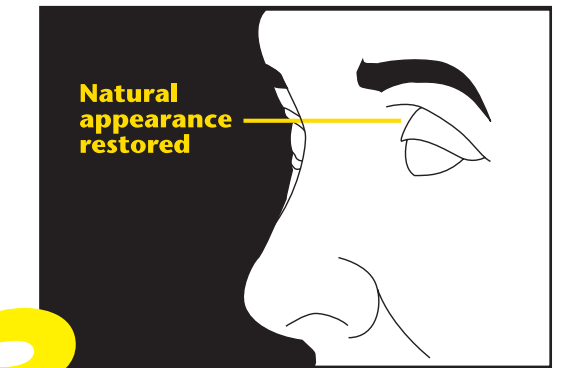
Ready for eyelid surgery?



1 Is the skin of your upper eyelids overhanging your normal lid crease?



2 Dr. Skidmore assures that upper eyelid blepharoplasty is a minimally invasive procedure. The small incision is made along the natural lid crease.



3 Because the eyes are the focal point on the face, upper eyelid blepharoplasty can result not only in a wider field of vision, but also a more attractive appearance.

The eyes have it!

The doctors at Community Eye Center welcome the opportunity to help you protect and improve your eye health and achieve your best vision. Community Eye Center and St. Lucy’s Outpatient Surgery Center are located at **2175 Olean Blvd.** in Port Charlotte, phone **(941) 625-1325**. The North Port office is located at **1331 South Sumter Blvd.**, phone **(941) 423-8137**. The Punta Gorda office is located at **615 Cross St., Suite #1109**, phone **(941) 637-7168**.

YES! I want to learn more about my eyes. Please send me the following FREE brochures:

- Macular degeneration
- Diabetic eye care
- Small-incision cataract surgery
- Corneal transplant surgery
- CLEAR (clear lens exchange and astigmatic reduction)
- Flashers and floaters
- Eyelid surgery
- Glaucoma treatment

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____

Mail to: Community Eye Center, 2175 Olean Blvd., Port Charlotte, FL 33952, or phone (941) 625-1325