

Erasing Lines Around Your Mouth

By Ayren Jackson-Cannady

Those vertical lines that run from the sides of the nose to the chin are cute if you're Pinocchio. But if you're a real person they're just plain annoying.

Deep lines around your mouth -- also called nasolabial folds -- become more visible as we age. That's because the ligaments around the mouth and chin loosen, allowing fatty tissue in cheeks to sag.

"If you look at your mom, dad, or older sibling and they have them, there is a great chance you will also develop them," says Elie Levine, MD, a New York City plastic surgeon. "Secondary factors that can lead to deep puppet lines include loss of collagen and elastin (the building blocks of the skin), weight fluctuations, smoking, and sun exposure." Before you vow to never smile again, try one of these doctor-recommended treatment options.



Preventing Deep Lines in Your 30s and 40s

You're a great candidate for a filler like Juvederm or Restylane. These hyaluronic acid treatments last 12 to 18 months. The fillers push up and support the folds that create deep lines.

Preventing Deep Lines in Your 40s and 50s

Botox prevents or slows the development of deeper lines. Its active ingredient, botulinum toxin, relaxes small muscles around the mouth that help create frowns, says Levine. Fewer frowns equal fewer frown lines.

Dealing With Lines in Your 60s and Beyond

You may see results from a face or neck lift to tighten loose skin. Laser techniques that treat fine lines and tighten skin are also a great option.

What You Can Do at Home

The best at-home treatment is prevention. That means protecting your skin from the sun and eating lots of antioxidant-rich foods such as berries, broccoli, and carrots. This helps keep the collagen and elastin below the surface of your skin strong.

It's also important to maintain your weight -- significant weight shifts can contribute to lines around your mouth, says Levine. And of course, avoid smoking, since chemicals in smoke can destroy collagen and elastin.

Using a retinol or retinoid cream can help, too. "Retinol slowly thickens the deeper layers of the skin, while thinning out the superficial layers," says Levine. "This softens fine marionette lines, making the skin look more youthful."