Facelift Complications: Prevention, Recognition, and Management

Agus Roy Rusly Hariantana Hamid, MD, PhD
Bali, Indonesia

Abstract

Facelift (rhytidectomy) remains one of the most effective procedures for facial rejuvenation, yet it is technically demanding and associated with a spectrum of potential complications. Although the overall incidence of major complications is low, unfavorable outcomes may significantly affect both functional recovery and aesthetic satisfaction. Successful management begins with meticulous preoperative planning, sound knowledge of facial anatomy, and adherence to safe surgical principles.

This lecture reviews the most frequently encountered complications following facelift surgery, including hematoma, skin flap ischemia and necrosis, facial nerve injury, salivary complications, infection, hypertrophic scarring, contour irregularities, pixie ear deformity, alopecia, and unsatisfactory aesthetic outcomes. Particular attention is given to identifying patient-specific risk factors such as smoking, anticoagulant use, hypertension, previous facial procedures, and skin quality that may increase complication rates.

Preventive strategies are discussed throughout each stage of treatment, including patient selection, surgical planning, flap design, SMAS management, meticulous hemostasis, tension-free closure, and structured postoperative care. Evidence-based approaches for early recognition and timely intervention are highlighted to minimize morbidity and optimize long-term outcomes. Management algorithms for both early and late complications are presented, emphasizing practical decision-making in daily clinical practice.

Through case-based discussions and surgical pearls, this presentation aims to provide reconstructive and aesthetic surgeons with practical strategies to prevent complications, recognize problems at an early stage, and implement effective treatment. Understanding the mechanisms underlying facelift complications and adopting a systematic approach to their management are essential for improving patient safety, surgical outcomes, and overall satisfaction.

Keywords: facelift, rhytidectomy, complications, facial rejuvenation, hematoma, facial nerve injury, complication management.