

The uRepublic Guide to Filler Injections: Poly-L-lactic acid (Sculptra)

What is it & is it safe?

Sculptra (poly-L-lactic acid) is an injectable skin filler that can 'plump up' the skin to make it look smoother and fuller. Poly-L-lactic acid is a synthetically manufactured substance made up of chains of lactic acid. It is manufactured as a fine powder that is reconstituted in sterile water for injections. Poly-L-lactic acid is naturally degraded in the skin to a natural by-product that is safely cleared by the body. Poly-L-lactic acid has been in use in medicine for 20 years and is used to manufacture certain dissolvable stitches.

How does it work?

When injected into the skin, the poly-L-lactic acid gradually stimulates natural deposition of collagen to thicken and smoothen the skin. As the poly-L-lactic acid gets absorbed over time, the volume enhancing effects persists due to an increase in skin collagen triggered by poly-L-lactic acid.

What conditions can benefit from Poly-L-lactic acid fillers?

- Fine wrinkling
- Loss of skin volume
- Increased skin folds and coarse wrinkles
- Hollow or sunken cheeks through weight loss, illness or disease
- HIV and other disease related wasting of the face
- Thin skin on back of hands

What does the procedure involve?

Multiple fine injections into the cheeks and areas of the face that appear hollow or sunken. The procedure can be done without anaesthetic, but a cream anaesthetic applied 15–30 mins beforehand to make the procedure more comfortable. Ice can be used to effectively numb the skin prior to the injections. The treated area is also massaged by the doctor or nurse after the injections.

What happens after treatment and how long will the results last?

After treatment, it is important for you to massage the treated area 5 times a day for 5 minutes each time, to minimize any uneven product distribution or lumpiness that may occur. There will be initial mild bruising and swelling for 3–4 days. When this settles, the treated area may appear no different than from before treatment. However, over the next several months, there will be gradual thickening of the collagen layer of the skin resulting in better looking skin. In most cases, a minimum of 2 injections 4–6 weeks apart is necessary to produce a noticeable change. Some patients may not notice any changes until after the second injection. It's worth noting that HIV lipodystrophy or disease-related facial wasting may require up to 5 treatment sessions. The skin volume enhancing effects will last for up to 18 months.

What are the unwanted side effects of Poly-L-lactic fillers?

Common to other filler injections, you may experience pain, swelling and bruising which will settle without further intervention. There was initial concern about the risk of developing small nodules (lumps) with poly-L-lactic acid, but this has been subsequently shown to be the result of inadequate dilution, poor injection technique and lack of post-treatment massage. Nodules or lumps are uncommon following this treatment but will only require further intervention (corticosteroids injections or tablets) if visible. Very rarely, skin lumps may develop several months to years later. However, in skilled hands, the incidence of side effects is not much greater than any other fillers on the market.

Is everyone suitable for Poly-L-lactic fillers?

We do not treat:

- Pregnant or breast-feeding women
- Children under age 18 without parental consent
- Current significant skin disease / infections such as cold sores at the site of treatment
- Individuals with a history of collagen/ scarring/ connective tissue disorders
- Anyone with emotional, mental or medical condition that may impair judgment
- Anyone with a history of significant adverse reactions to filler injections
- Allergy to dissolvable suture material.

How to minimise bruising

If possible, stop blood thinners such as Vit E, fish oil, aspirin and non steroidal anti-inflammatories up to 5 days before treatment. Stopping the medication will reduce the likelihood of bruising. However, it is not necessary to stop them if you need the above medication for established medical conditions.