Heavy Upper Lids

Having heavy upper lids can cause you to experience of a variety of problems. Even when it is mild, it can be cosmetically displeasing. When it becomes severe enough to obstruct your pupils, we say it is visually significant – it begins to affect your vision (how crisp your vision is) and your visual field (how much of the world you can see).

You may have heard from friends or family that have had heavy upper lids corrected in the past that the fix is simple. They just needed excess skin removed from the upper lid which solved the issue. The reality is that not every patient is that simple.

Heavy upper lids are caused by one or a combination of three major problems: the eyebrows falling onto the eyelids (called eyebrow ptosis), excess skin (called dermatochalasis) on the upper lids, and finally the eyelid itself being low (called blepharoptosis). Encircled below are which issues are causing your heavy upper lids. Each problem is corrected by unique surgical procedures, and if you have a combination of these problems, having surgery to correct one problem will not correct the others fully.

1. Eyebrow ptosis:

The position and shape of your eyebrows play a crucial role in the appearance of your upper eyelids. Eyebrows that are low or have lost their natural arch can create the illusion of heavy upper lids, especially on the outer part of the eyelids. To correct eyebrow ptosis, you need to have a procedure called a brow ptosis repair which can be done with a variety of techniques. Your doctor will explain your options, and you will jointly decide which option is best for you. Importantly, you cannot fully correct brow ptosis by removing skin from the upper lids, a common misconception. Note that if you are compensating with your eyebrows for one the problems below and you have surgery to correct one of the other problems, you lose the impetus to raise your eyebrows – they may drop down after eyelid surgery.

2. Dermatochalasis:

Dermatochalasis refers to the excess skin and fat on the upper eyelids. This can be cosmetically displeasing and can weigh down the lids, affecting your sight. To correct this problem, the skin and fat from the upper lid can be removed, called a blepharoplasty.

3. Blepharoptosis AKA “ptosis”

Blepharoptosis refers to the drooping of the upper eyelid due to weakened or stretched muscles responsible for lifting the eyelid. Ptosis can be congenital (present from birth) or acquired (developing later in life). When you have ptosis, this problem is present regardless of the eyebrows or excess skin on the lid. To correct this problem, you need a ptosis repair. Surgery for ptosis is the most nuanced of the three problems and requires an expert in the correction of this problem. Your doctor will discuss your options for repair, and similarly to brow ptosis repair, you will jointly decide which option is best for you.

Surgery for these issues can be covered by insurance, but certain procedures (such as endoscopic brow lift) are always cosmetic in nature. In order to have these procedures covered by insurance, you must meet three criteria: your exam must show that the problem obstructs your pupils, your photographs must show the problem(s) obstruct your pupils, and you must have a ptosis visual field done both with and without tape that shows taping the problem out of your field of vision improves your performance of the field, proving the problem affects you. If you do not meet criteria for insurance, you can either wait until the problem becomes visually significant or you can have the surgery done cosmetically. It is very difficult to meet criteria to have more than one procedure covered for insurance at a time, and if you have multiple of these problems that need to be corrected with surgery, the procedures will typically need to be staged.