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Nic Isse has done hundreds of eyelash transplants, which can replace damaged or lost lashes. Christopher Pike / The National

Get a permanent plump as eyelash transplants have arrived in the UAE

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You've probably heard of hair transplants. But did you know that you can also get eyelash transplants done in the UAE?

Plastic surgeon Nic Isse, working out of the American Surgecenter in Abu Dhabi, claims that he can boost the fullness of lashes forever – with a one-time, Dh15,000 transplant operation.

The Argentinian doctor, who divides his time between his practice in California and Abu Dhabi, has also performed moustache and beard transplants on Abu Dhabi's gents, and eyebrow implants on both genders. "All procedures involving hair are done the same way," he says, comparing the transplanting process to gardening.

"You remove one hair at a time, then create openings and plant the hairs, like you are planting little plants in pots," he says. "I am a good gardener. I love roses."

Isse says the operation is particularly recommended for eyelashes that have been burnt or fallen out due to chemotherapy or due to continued application of eyelash extensions.

Surgery is done under local anaesthetic, with the help of some sedatives to relax the patient. Most of an operation, which runs between two and four hours, is spent selecting the most appropriate hair follicles from the back of the head, shaving the donor area and removing the follicles using small, circular incisions, called punches, which are less than 1 millimetre in size.

"Thick hair is easier to harvest, and thick, dark hair is more noticeable when transplanted," says Isse. Blondes and redheads can get the procedure done, too, "but they do often have to come back to have more put in".

When Isse has extracted three to five different sets of hair follicles (between 15 and 45 hairs for each eyelash), he begins implanting.

A lubricant is placed on the eyeball, which is shielded from accidental scratching with a hard plastic cover.

Using needles, Isse makes openings in the skin of the eyelid and implants the hair follicles he has harvested into them. They stay put, he explains, because "blood acts like a glue that holds the hair in place, until the body creates scar tissue around it".

Patients are advised to keep the eye area as dry as possible, skip any exertion for 48 hours and refrain from wearing mascara for 10 days.

Patients can expect temporary "blood crusting" on the scalp and eyelids. Usually there isn't any pain after the procedure, only some discomfort, which can be treated with over-the-counter pain killers.

About 10 per cent of the transplanted hairs fall out in the first week, before the body has formed tissue around the hair.

"When patients are sleeping, they may rub their eyes and knock down a couple of hairs," says Isse. "The remaining lashes will be permanent."

Care will need to be taken with the new transplants. And although the surgery has become increasingly popular in the last few years, as with any surgery, there is the possibility of complications.

They can include trichiasis, or misdirected lash growth, which can irritate or, in extreme cases, damage the eye.

But Isse, who has done hundreds of the transplants, says that there should be no complications when the procedure is done by an experienced, board-certified surgeon.

"If you have straight hair, then your new eyelashes need to be curled," Dr Isse explains. "And since it's living hair, it will keep on growing. So you have to trim it."

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