

POLY-L-LACTIC ACID (PLLA) INJECTIONS

What is Poly-L-Lactic Acid?

Poly-L-lactic acid (PLLA) is a biostimulatory injectable treatment used to gradually restore facial volume and improve skin texture by stimulating the body's own collagen production. Unlike dermal fillers that provide immediate volume, PLLA works progressively over several months to create a natural, long-lasting rejuvenating effect. It is commonly known by brand names such as *Sculptra*® or *Lanluma*®.

Why might I choose to have this procedure?

You may consider PLLA injections if you wish to restore facial fullness lost through ageing or illness, improve skin firmness, or soften deep lines and folds. PLLA can also be used to improve skin quality in areas such as the cheeks, temples, jawline, and sometimes the body (for example, décolletage or buttocks). The results develop gradually, offering subtle, natural rejuvenation without the sudden changes associated with volumising fillers.

What does the procedure involve?

A consultation will take place before treatment to review your medical history, discuss your goals, and ensure suitability. PLLA comes as a powder that is mixed with sterile water, and sometimes anaesthetic, before injection. The skin is cleaned and topical or local anaesthetic may be applied for comfort. The product is then injected using a fine needle or cannula into targeted areas, typically in a grid or fanning pattern. The procedure usually takes 30–60 minutes. You may be advised to massage the treated areas afterwards to help evenly distribute the product.

What are the benefits of the procedure?

PLLA stimulates new collagen formation in the skin, gradually improving facial structure and elasticity. The effects develop over several months, resulting in restoration of facial volume and improvement in skin firmness. The results are long-lasting, often maintained for 2-3 years with occasional top-up treatments.

What are the risks and potential side effects?

Common:

- Redness, swelling, tenderness, or bruising at injection sites
- Temporary small lumps or bumps under the skin

- Mild discomfort or tightness in the treated area

Uncommon:

- Longer-lasting nodules or unevenness (usually improves with massage)
- Temporary asymmetry or contour irregularities

Rare:

- Infection or abscess formation
- Granuloma (inflammatory nodule formation) requiring medical treatment
- Inflammation or allergic-type reaction

Extremely rare:

- Vascular occlusion (when injected product blocks a blood vessel), which can lead to skin injury or, in very rare cases, visual problems

Your practitioner will discuss how these risks are minimised, including the use of correct technique, dilution, and massage protocols.

What alternatives are available?

Alternatives include hyaluronic acid dermal fillers (for immediate volume), collagen-stimulating injectables such as calcium hydroxylapatite, or non-injectable treatments such as radiofrequency or ultrasound-based tightening procedures. Sometimes no treatment may be required. Your dermatologist can discuss which option best suits your goals and preferences.

What should I expect after the procedure?

The skin may appear red or mildly swollen immediately after treatment, and small bumps can sometimes be felt under the skin for a few days. Bruising may occur. You will be advised to massage the treated area for several minutes, several times a day, for the first 5 days after treatment to ensure even distribution. Avoid strenuous exercise, saunas, or excessive heat for 24 hours. Results develop gradually over 8-12 weeks, with further improvement after additional sessions.

How many treatments will I need?

A series of treatments is typically recommended. Most patients require 2–3 sessions spaced about 4-6 weeks apart, depending on individual needs. Maintenance treatments may be performed every 1-2 years to preserve results.

Who should not have this procedure?

PLLA injections are not suitable if you have an active skin infection, inflammation, or rash in the treatment area, are pregnant or breastfeeding, or have a history of keloid scarring, autoimmune disease, or allergy to any component of the product. A full medical history will be taken during the consultation.

Who can perform this procedure?

PLLA injections should only be performed by trained healthcare professionals such as consultant dermatologists or other qualified practitioners with specific training in injectable biostimulatory treatments, working within a regulated medical environment.

Will I need a consultation?

Yes. A face-to-face consultation is essential before treatment to assess suitability, review your medical history, explain the procedure, discuss alternatives, and obtain informed consent. You should have time to ask questions and consider your decision before proceeding.

What to do in an emergency?

Although complications are rare, seek urgent medical attention if you experience severe pain, rapid swelling, pale or dusky skin discolouration, blisters, or visual changes after treatment. Contact your treating dermatologist immediately. If unavailable, seek help via NHS 111 or your nearest Emergency Department.

Where can I get more information?

You can find more information from:

- The British Cosmetic Dermatology Group (BCDG)
- The Joint Council for Cosmetic Practitioners (JCCP)
- NHS guidance on cosmetic procedures

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