

TIMELESS REBELS

The 5-Minute Facelift

A real, evidence-based daily routine for a firmer, less puffy face — no
needles, no surgery, five minutes

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Why this actually works

Have you ever wondered if any of the "5-minute facelift" routines floating around actually work, or if you're just wasting five minutes hoping? We wondered the same thing — so before we wrote a single step of this guide, we read the actual studies. No filters, no miracle claims, no catch. Just what the research really shows, laid out honestly, so you can decide for yourself whether it's worth your five minutes.

In a 2018 Northwestern University study published in JAMA Dermatology, women aged 40–65 who followed a daily facial exercise routine were rated by independent dermatologists as looking nearly three years younger after 20 weeks — with the biggest improvements in upper and lower cheek fullness.

The logic: as we age, the fat pads under facial skin thin and shift, and skin loses elasticity. Facial exercise strengthens the muscle underneath, giving skin "more stuffing" to sit on — the same principle as resistance training anywhere else on the body.

Separately, a 2025 randomized controlled trial found that gua sha facial massage measurably reduced facial contour distances (comparable to clinical manual lymphatic drainage) and reduced facial muscle tension after 8 weeks of regular use. Other research has shown a single gua sha session can boost local microcirculation roughly fourfold, lasting over 25 minutes — which is the mechanism behind that immediate "de-puffed, sculpted" look.

ONE HONEST NOTE

The JAMA study used 30 minutes of exercise daily. We've distilled it down to the highest-value 5 minutes, because a shorter routine you'll actually stick to beats a perfect one you abandon after a week. Expect the de-puffing effects to show up same-day; expect muscle-tone changes to build gradually with consistency, not overnight.

Five minutes, once a day

Do this in the morning to de-puff before your day, or at night as part of your skincare wind-down. Consistency matters more than which time you pick.

MINUTE 1 — PREP

Apply 2–3 drops of facial oil so your fingers or gua sha tool glide without tugging the skin. Tugging dry skin does more harm than the massage does good.

MINUTES 1–2 — LYMPHATIC WARM-UP

Using a gua sha tool or the flat of your fingers, apply light pressure and stroke outward and upward only — from the center of your face toward your ears, then down the sides of your neck toward your collarbone. This follows your natural lymphatic pathways and is what drives the de-puffing effect. Never scrub back and forth; always one gentle direction.

MINUTES 2–3 — THE CHEEK LIFTER

Open your mouth to form an "O" shape and fold your upper lip over your teeth. Smile to lift your cheek muscles upward, then place your fingers on the top part of your cheeks. Release the cheek muscles to lower them, then lift back up. Repeat 10 times. This is one of the core exercises from the original JAMA study protocol, and it directly targets the upper/lower cheek fullness that showed the strongest improvement in the research.

MINUTES 3–4 — FOREHEAD & EYE SMOOTHER

Place your fingertips just above your eyebrows and gently press down while trying to raise your eyebrows against the resistance. Hold for 5 seconds, release, repeat 10 times. This targets the forehead and brow area, building muscle tone in a spot most skincare products can't reach.

MINUTES 4–5 — FINAL SWEEP + SPF LOCK-IN

Finish with one more gentle gua sha pass from center-face outward to your ears and down your neck, then follow immediately with your regular moisturizer and, if it's morning, SPF. This isn't just a nice finishing touch — sun protection does more to prevent visible aging than any single routine, including this one.

No hype, just honesty

- **Same day:** Reduced puffiness and a more "sculpted," awake look — this comes from lymphatic fluid movement and lasts hours, not permanently. It's a genuine refresh, not a facelift in the surgical sense.
- **Weeks 2–4:** If you're consistent, you may start to notice slightly firmer-feeling cheeks as the underlying muscle responds — this is the slower-building effect the JAMA study measured.
- **The evidence gap:** Facial exercise has real clinical backing (one solid pilot study); gua sha's anti-aging claims are still considered "insufficient evidence" by dermatology reviews for anything beyond temporary de-puffing and muscle relaxation. We're including both because they're low-risk, low-cost, and the honest research support for each is laid out above — not oversold as more than it is.
- **What this won't do:** Replace deeper structural changes (bone and fat loss) that only injectables or surgery address. Think of this as strengthening what you have, not rebuilding what's changed.

This guide is for educational purposes and reflects published research as of 2026. It is not a substitute for professional dermatological or medical advice. If you have a skin condition, recent facial procedure, or are unsure whether facial massage is right for you, check with a dermatologist first. Sources include a 2018 study in *JAMA Dermatology* (Northwestern University), a 2025 randomized controlled trial in the *Journal of Cosmetic Dermatology*, and published microcirculation research on gua sha massage.