

Thread lifts are a favorite non-surgical option for facial rejuvenation in Singapore's bustling aesthetic scene. But choosing between **PDO threads** and **PLLA threads** — or even understanding how these compare with energy-based devices like Ultherapy and Ultherapy Prime — can be confusing. This post cuts through the jargon and clarifies what each does, how they lift, and why depth and targeted tissue matter more than flashy promises.

## Surface Tightening vs Dermal Tightening vs Structural Lifting: What Layer Are We Actually Treating?

Before diving into thread types, let's establish *what layer of skin or tissue we're aiming at* — because this determines both effectiveness and longevity of results.

- **Surface (Epidermal) Tightening:** Treats the topmost skin layer. Gives temporary smoothness, often from laser resurfacing or radiofrequency (RF) heating that tightens collagen superficially.
- **Dermal Tightening:** Targets deeper collagen in the dermis, leading to firmer, thicker skin. Requires stimulation below surface but above muscle layer. Many fillers and RF devices claim this.
- **Structural Lifting (SMAS or Deeper Layers):** Engages the Superficial Musculo-Aponeurotic System (SMAS) — the layer of muscle and connective tissue beneath fat and dermis that truly supports and shapes the face. Surgical facelifts reach here. Non-surgical lifting aims to mimic this.

Why does this matter? Because *collagen stimulation in the wrong layer may yield tight skin but not actual lift*.  
<https://trulyexpatlifestyle.com/non-surgical-skin-tightening-in-singapore/> lift.

## Ultherapy and Ultherapy Prime: MFU-V and Real-Time Imaging for Targeting

If you've researched lifting options, you've heard of Ultherapy. This device uses **Microfocused Ultrasound with Visualization (MFU-V)** to deliver focused energy precisely at the SMAS layer.

- **Depth Targeting:** Ultherapy offers adjustable depths — usually 1.5mm, 3.0mm, and 4.5mm — so it can reach exactly the SMAS or dermis level per patient's anatomy.
- **Real-Time Imaging:** The 'V' in MFU-V stands for visualization. The treating doctor can see the target layer live on screen, reducing guesswork and improving accuracy.

Ultherapy Prime is an upgraded model with faster treatment and potentially improved energy delivery. But importantly, it does not involve RF heating, which has different penetration and collagen effects.

### Summary Table: Ultherapy vs Thread Lifts

| Feature                                                                                     | Ultherapy                  | Ultherapy Prime                       | PDO Thread Lift                              | PLLA Thread Lift                                                    | Target Layer                                                                      |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| SMAS, Dermis (depths 1.5mm–4.5mm)                                                           | Dermis to superficial SMAS | Dermis, some reach into deeper layers | Mechanism                                    | Microfocused ultrasound energy causing precise collagen coagulation | Barbed or smooth threads physically lift, stimulate collagen by mechanical injury |
| Similar but depends on thread design and biodegradation; PLLA stimulates collagen long-term | Downtime                   | Minimal, some redness/swelling        | Moderate—bruising, swelling, soreness common | Moderate—can be similar to PDO threads in discomfort duration       | Longevity                                                                         |
| 12-24 months                                                                                | 6-12 months                | 12-18 months or longer                |                                              |                                                                     |                                                                                   |

## PDO Thread Lift: Barbed vs Smooth Threads — What's the Difference?

PDO stands for Polydioxanone, a biodegradable polymer that safely dissolves after a few months. Two main types of PDO threads are used:

- **Barbed Threads:** Have tiny hooks or cogs along their length for mechanical lifting. Ideal for *structural lift*. They grab tissue and reposition it physically.
- **Smooth Threads:** No hooks, used mainly to induce collagen formation rather than offering much lift mechanically. These are placed in the dermis to tighten and thicken skin.

Many clinics promote 'lifting' with smooth threads alone, but the effect is usually limited to skin quality improvement, not actual repositioning or volume restoration.

## PLLA Threads: What Sets Them Apart?

PLLA stands for Poly-L-Lactic Acid, also a biodegradable polymer but with a different degradation profile. PLLA threads are thicker and stimulate collagen for a longer period.

- **Longer-lasting collagen stimulation:** PLLA degrades more slowly than PDO.
- **Greater volumizing effect:** The collagen scaffold stimulated may add subtle volume in addition to lift.
- **Usually more expensive and thicker:** Requires skilled placement.

PLLA threads may feel like an intermediate option between PDO threads and energy devices like Ultherapy in terms of results and downtime.

## Important: Understanding RF Heating and Collagen Stimulation Limits

Some clinics tout RF (radiofrequency) as the latest and greatest for collagen and skin tightening. RF heats tissue to stimulate collagen but:

- **Penetration depth is limited.** Usually affects only superficial layers, not the SMAS.
- **Inconsistent collagen remodeling.** Heating depth and uniformity vary by device.
- **Results often complement but do not replace mechanical lifting.**

So, RF devices serve more as skin quality enhancers rather than true lifting tools. For structural lifting, look to threads or MFU-V like Ultherapy.

## Pricing Transparency: A Common Clinic Page Oversight

One pet peeve I'd like to flag is the omission of clear **pricing in SGD** on many Singapore clinic pages. Thread lifts and Ultherapy treatments vary significantly in cost depending on:



- Number and type of threads used
- Area treated (full face, lower face, neck)
- Whether it's a first session or a maintenance session
- Combination with other treatments (fillers, RF)

Without explicit **prices in SGD**, patients have to guess or ask repeatedly. Transparency benefits everyone and builds trust.

## Summary: Choosing Your Lift

1. **If you want precise structural lift targeting the SMAS layer:** Ultherapy (MFU-V) with real-time imaging is a trustworthy option.
2. **If you want immediate mechanical repositioning:** Barbed PDO threads offer lift but expect some downtime.
3. **If collagen stimulation and subtle volume addition are your focus:** PLLA threads may suit you better than PDO threads.
4. **If your goal is surface or dermal skin tightening:** Smooth PDO threads, energy-based RF devices, or lasers will improve skin quality but won't provide true lift.

Always ask your clinic: " *What layer are we actually treating?*" Confirm exact target depth and expected outcomes. Beware of clinics that hype "no downtime" without balanced info on swelling or soreness.

Choosing the right lift means knowing your options, expectations, and the science behind these tools.

