

lip plumper

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Lip Plumper

A product applied to make the lips appear fuller. The honest description of how the mainstream version works is short and worth stating first: **it is a controlled irritant**. The swelling is inflammation, the tingle is the mechanism, and both are temporary.

The three mechanisms

Mechanism	Ingredients	What happens	Lasts
Irritant vasodilation	Cinnamon, capsicum, ginger, menthol, camphor, nicotinate esters, wintergreen	Mild inflammation -> vasodilation -> oedema. Redness and swelling	30 min – 2 hours
Humectant swelling	Hyaluronic acid, palmitoyl oligopeptide, collagen-adjacent peptides	Water drawn into the surface layers; mild, comfortable	An hour or two
Optical	Gloss, light-reflecting pearl, Lip Liner placement	A specular highlight along the centre reads as convex volume	Until it wears off

The optical route is the only one with no downside, and it is what makeup artists actually rely on: a lighter, glossier centre, a slightly overlined cupid's bow, and a matte darker edge.

The cost of the irritant route

Repeated deliberate irritation of the vermillion is not free. The vermillion has a **very thin stratum corneum and no sebaceous glands**, so it recovers less readily than skin elsewhere. Frequent use is associated with:

- **Chronic dryness and chapping** — the loop where the fix causes the problem.
- **Contact dermatitis**, most often to cinnamates, which are among the most common lip allergens.
- **Post-inflammatory changes** in some people, including darkening at the border.
- Burning that is genuinely painful on already-cracked lips.

Occasional use before an evening is a reasonable trade. Daily use is a slow way to make lips look worse without makeup on.

What actually changes lip volume

Nothing topical. Lip volume is determined by anatomy, and it decreases with age as dermal collagen and subcutaneous volume decline. The interventions that change it are **dermal fillers** — hyaluronic acid injections performed by a clinician — and they are medical procedures with their own risk profile, including vascular occlusion. A cosmetic that claimed to do the same thing would be making a structure-or-function claim and would be a **drug**.

That regulatory line is the reason plumper packaging says "appearance of fuller lips" rather than "fuller lips".

Where it sits in the rules

Cosmetic in the US — FDA primary category (08), makeup preparations (not eye) — as long as the claims stay at appearance. A claim to increase lip volume, stimulate collagen, or produce a lasting anatomical change is a **drug claim** under FD&C Act sec. 201(g).

The colour additive rules for lip products apply in full: additives must be **approved specifically for cosmetic lip use**, certified colours must come from **FDA-certified batches**, and **carmine (CI 75470)** must be declared by name. FDA's December 2022 final guidance recommends a maximum of **10 ppm lead** in cosmetic lip products.

In the EU, the Common Criteria under Regulation (EC) No 1223/2009 require cosmetic claims to be supported by verifiable evidence, and permitted colorants come from the **Annex IV** closed list.

Shelf life

Twelve months after opening. Most are glosses, so the applicator returns to the reservoir after touching a mucosal surface each use.

Two format-specific notes: the volatile irritants — menthol, camphor, mint oils — **evaporate over time**, so an old plumper stings less and does less, and citrus and spice oils oxidise into more sensitising forms. If a product that never bothered you starts to burn, that is a reason to bin it rather than to persevere.

Do not share, and discard any tube used during a cold sore outbreak — and do not use a plumper on broken or cracked lips at all.

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- [Lip Balm](#) — what to use afterwards, and instead.
- Regulatory statements here follow the FDA and EU sources listed on [Cosmetics](#), read 16 August 2026.