



Should You Quit Botox?

Injectables might fight off angry creases and crow's feet, but consider putting down the needle in favour of non-invasive treatments

BY ANNIE DARLING

When Botox was approved in 2002 for cosmetic use, the idea seemed absurd. After all, who would allow someone to inject a deadly poison—a neurotoxin that causes potentially fatal botulism—into their face just to reduce the appearance of wrinkles? But since then, there's been a shift in the way we see ourselves. The reasons for this are varied, but many would agree that the impact of just one thing, social media, has triggered a new set of beauty ideals and an increase in cosmetic procedures.

I have nothing against cosmetic surgery. In fact, by the nature of my job, I regularly research cutting-edge procedures and stream beauty tutorials online. But there's no denying that with any drug, there are risks. Possible side effects from Botox injections range from drooping eyelids and double vision to difficulty speaking and swallowing.

"The reality is that we really don't know what the long-term implications of Botox are," says Melissa Day of Niroshini Cosmetic Acupuncture, which offers natural alternatives to cosmetic procedures. Day uses acupuncture to activate the skin and its underlying muscles, aiding lymphatic drainage, which improves circulation. By improving muscle tone with specialist massage techniques, Day says she is able to provide a "non-surgical facelift."

But the fact remains that injectables are convenient—the procedure only takes 10 minutes and you can resume your usual routine immediately afterwards. And there's safety in numbers: Botox injections are the most-performed non-surgical dermatological procedure, with more than six million treatments administered worldwide each year, according to Medical News Today.

IMAGE: COURTESY OF NAILA RUECHEL AND PLAIN VIEW AT GETTY IMAGES

But there's a fine line between targeted tweaks and doing too much. No longer sold as a means of looking younger, today we see a face that's "done" and admire it as bought beauty—although it doesn't last, argues Day. "Botox only lasts for three to six months," she says, adding that the skin can also appear thinner and looser over time. "If you use it too much your muscles become weaker, so you use surrounding muscles to make facial expressions, and this will actually increase your number of wrinkles."

Despite numerous skincare brands claiming Botox-like results, the truth is that there's little else that inhibits muscle activity like an injectable neurotoxin. But replicating the effects of Botox isn't the point, argues Day. "Your skin will be tighter, brighter

administered sculpting facial like *gua sha*, an ancient Chinese ritual that improves skin elasticity, will "knock 10 years off." In Chinese medicine, the *gua sha* tool, an angled, blunt-edged stone made from crystal, bone or horn, lifts the face through gentle, upward strokes, which relaxes the muscles and promotes tissue drainage. "Sculpting facials are mini-facelifts that I recommend to all my clients," says Shugaa, "especially before a red-carpet event."

Face creams and serums containing ingredients that enhance the skin's texture are also underrated, says Maria Hatzistefanis, who established skincare group Rodial. The instant wrinkle minimiser Liftonin, she says, is remarkably successful in combating skin ageing and can be found in several of her products, including Rodial's



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ULTHERAPY

Concentrated ultrasound energy is used to tighten facial muscles, which naturally lifts your face. This is a convenient choice if you're someone who is always on the go, as no downtime is involved, although you might notice some redness for up to 24 hours afterwards.

Where to go: Cosmetic Central; 18/F, 2-8 Wellington Street (M88), Central; +852 2806 2829

COSMETIC ACUPUNCTURE

Cosmetic acupuncture boasts a host of facial benefits for problems from acne to ageing and has long been performed by Chinese medical practitioners. Often combined with facials, it reduces puffiness. It's not always a quick fix and several appointments might be needed before you begin to see real results.

Where to go: Eu Yan Sang Premier Chinese Medicine Centre; 6/F, The Sharp, 11 Sharp Street East, Causeway Bay; +852 2574 9132

CRYOTHERAPY

The next big trend in anti-ageing, LED light and cold vapour are blasted to boost cell rejuvenation and collagen, which plumps the face. Not for the faint-hearted, this treatment isn't the most relaxing but is well worth the discomfort. Perfect for jet-setters and city dwellers who are regularly exposed to pollution.

Where to go: The Ritz-Carlton Spa; International Commerce Centre, 1 Austin Rd W, Tsim Sha Tsui; +852 2263 2040

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and smoother with these alternative treatments, but you'll still look like you, which isn't always the case after cosmetic procedures." And Day isn't alone in her thinking—there's an entire subsection of experts who specialise in getting people off Botox as part of an overall movement that promotes self-acceptance.

"When actors have Botox injections," says facialist Nuz Shugaa, whose A-list clients include Amanda Seyfried, Gemma Arterton and Luke Evans, "they can't move their face naturally, which makes it difficult for them to show emotion on set." For them, she recommends instead an in-depth skincare regimen that includes daily exfoliation—she swears by Jean d'Estrées Paris—as well as regular chemical peels and topical treatments.

"Facial acupuncture is also effective, as it's about training your skin," she says, adding that a well-

Pink Diamond serum. "Regular facials are also a good alternative to Botox," she says. "Laser facials remove hyperpigmentation and smooth the skin's texture, while ultrasound energy treatments work wonders on fine lines and wrinkles because they boost collagen production."

There are currently no alternatives to Botox that are as effective, and for those who do use it, the toxin is short-lived, so it won't remain in the body forever. But with experts admitting more research is needed on how it interacts with the body, and given the renewed interest in celebrating individuality rather than trying to conform to an unattainable standard, perhaps it's time we give these natural and safer alternative treatments a try? After all, as Shugaa eloquently argues, "We try to avoid chemicals in our diet, so why do we choose to inject them into our face?"