

ANTI AGING: IN-OFFICE PROCEDURES

by David Andrusia EDGE Contributor Saturday Apr 4, 2009

There comes a time, somewhere after forty, that the inevitable pulling and tugging-of eyes, neck, cheeks-begins. In Los Angeles, this happens first in car mirrors (in combination with the glaring sun, a most unforgiving reflective apparatus). But wherever you first start lifting and tugging, the effect is the same: How did I get to look like THIS?

About the same time, we inevitably start looking seriously at the media coverage (and, yes, ads) for in-office procedures-but the dizzying array of treatments available can confuse even the initiated. As someone who's spent 20 years writing about beauty, I couldn't myself discern the best options available; how, then, can anyone else? Compounding the problem is that the FDA regulations are murky: MDs, DDSs, and nurses alike can administer Botox, and aestheticians without a high school diploma can treat patients with lasers. Even within the realm of doctors, confusion ensues when faced with the choice among specialties.

Demystification is de rigueur. What, then, are the in-office anti-aging procedures currently available, and how to choose?

We talked at length with Stuart H. Kaplan, M.D., a dermatologist in private practice in Beverly Hills. Dr. Kaplan, who has treated a long list of celebrities-including members of the Red Hot Chili Peppers and Guns 'n' Roses, as well as Oscar winning actors and actresses-is warm, empathetic, and patiently provided a kaleidoscopic view of the in-office treatments available today.

Above all, Dr. Kaplan offered a very convincing rationale for seeing a dermatologist for these procedures. "Many plastic surgeons offer similar ranges of services as part of their practices. However, even when they themselves administer the procedures-and you must keep in mind that sometimes it is nurses who do so, not the doctors themselves-their field of specialization involves cutting of the skin, rather than treating the skin itself. Treating skin is the exclusive province of dermatologists, who spend four years in medical school, then four additional years in residency."

Further, Dr. Kaplan advises, "Anti-aging treatment of the skin cannot be separated from overall medical treatment of the skin." He himself has seen cases of patients who go to so-called medi-spas (where a doctor's name may be associated with the business, but his/her presence is not constant) in which nurses or aestheticians misdiagnose serious skin problems such as shingles-and can actually cause further skin degeneration. Certainly, nurses and aestheticians are "not trained in the musculature and anatomy of the skin and face," another argument against seeing lesser trained practitioners. Likewise, "only a dermatologist is trained to recognize and treat skin cancers, melanomas, and other conditions; thus, it would be very ill advised to have any aspect of your skin health-preventive, anti-aging, or otherwise-treated by someone outside the specialty."

This said, there are certainly plastic surgeons who have conscientiously added in-office, non-invasive anti-aging programs to their practices. How to discern their respective level of commitment to these practices? A consultation is requisite. Most important is to find out who in the office performs procedures: the physician him/herself or a nurse associate? Approximately what percentage of the doctor's practice comprises these procedures, as opposed to in-office or in-hospital surgeries?

Perhaps most vital of all: What is their general outlook about these options vis-à-vis surgery? If you get the feeling that the physician performs these as an adjunct service, or as a de facto money-making vehicle-one surgeon we spoke with all but scorned non-surgical procedures, so deprecatory was his tone-our advice would be to find another doctor. Finally, if these procedures are administered by a nurse, find out what kind of training he or she has had. In many cases-and especially in today's economy-you'll be able to find a doctor who performs these him/herself; given their greater body of knowledge, we ourselves would be hard-pressed to recommend undergoing these procedures with someone who does not possess a medical degree. *(continued)*



What, then, are the key categories of in-office anti-aging procedures available in physicians' offices? To demystify the process, we would group these into several key treatment areas:

RELAXERS

In a word, relaxers freeze muscles so that they relax- and therefore don't turn into the furrows and frown lines that form on the forehead, around the lips, and between and around the eyes. **Botox** is the primary product here, and still the most widely used.

A typical treatment runs \$300-600, depending on the amount of product used and your doctor's fees. You can expect the results to last about four months, though every patient experiences slightly different results.

In terms of pain, we've seen the procedure performed; more stoic patients don't wince, though some do, but the pain level doesn't seem to be anything more intense than that of a Novocaine injection.

It's also worth noting that the full results of Botox can take several weeks to appear, as muscles relax following treatment. Results also differ from patient to patients, and as a consequence of whether this is an initial or follow-up injection program.



Dr. Oscar Hevia, a board-certified plastic surgeon at Dr. Brandt's Cosmetic & Skin Associates, a comprehensive laser and cosmetic dermatology practice in Coral Gables, FL., is excited about Reloxin, slated for FDA approval in April. Although the price has not been confirmed it's predicted that Reloxin will be less expensive than Botox, and it has several advantages as well. First, while Botox can take up to one week to show a cumulative effect, Reloxin works within a day or two; thus, it's perfect for an important event as soon as 24 hours away from the procedure. Second, Reloxin lasts slightly longer than Botox- typically, up to 5-6 months.

FILLERS

Restylane, Juvederm, Evolence, Sculptra, and Radiesse are the key brands of fillers. As you'd expect, these injectible products help plump the skin, and are especially effective for naso-labial folds. Many of these products are manufactured in different strengths; knowledge of the product and the prospective outcome is something a highly experienced physician will know, and can explain beforehand in a treatment plan.

A typical filler treatment will cost you about \$500, with Sculptra and Radiesse running slightly more.

LASERS

Perhaps the least understood of the major treatment options, lasers comes in many forms. You'll see advertisements for laser anti-aging programs from skincare centers, medi-spas, and even dentist's offices, yet the actual machine used in some of these places is often a distant relative to those in physicians' offices. Indeed, there is even variation among physicians' equipment.



As of this writing, the Sciton is considered the best of the genre, although you may hear otherwise depending on who you talk to. The Sciton providing a broad-based light (BBL), which is considered superior to the intense-pulse-light (IPL) machines used in non-medical facilities.

The Sciton's fractionated and BBL lasers have several functions: They can: a) treat discolorations (age spots and rosacea); b) resurface; and c) tighten the skin. As with other procedures, the laser is only as effective as the physician who's operating the machine-especially as full-face laser treatments (which can run as much as \$2,000 or more, depending on the depth, as opposed to \$750 for directed treatments at problem areas) actually form scabbing, and come with a completely recovery time of up to two weeks.

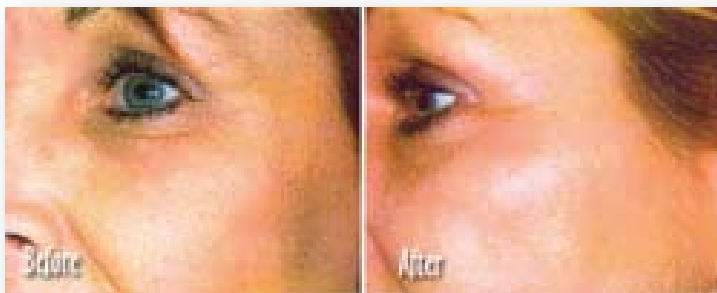
Dr. Warren C. Stout, named one of his city's best doctors by Pasadena Magazine in 2008, has pioneered a less invasive blepharoplasty (eyelid surgery) in which lasers, not a scalpel, make incisions in the skin. Trained at USC's medical school and the University of Miami's Bascom Palmer Eye Institute (rated #1 in ophthalmology), Dr. Stout, who has spent 25 years operating only on eyes, believes that "the laser is a precise cutting (*continued*)



implement that actually seals capillaries as it goes through tissue; thus, only a few drops of blood are actually seen during the surgery. The patient leaves an eyelid surgery unbruised, but starting to swell; after only a couple of days with ice packs, the swelling is all but gone and the discoloration and bruising are barely noticeable after a week."

What makes this work unique is Dr. Stout's commitment to "restorative surgery, in which I seek to reposition the skin rather than change its position vis-à-vis facial planes. My goal is to return a patient's eyes to his or her original, youthful look, not to drastically change the shape of the eyes- and thus, the entire face." Proof positive of his procedures' aesthetic outcomes: "Patients often tell me people ask them, 'Have you gone on vacation?' or 'Are you in love?' after surgeries. They look like the same person, only younger, fresher, and renewed." (Typically, this procedure runs about \$5,000; it is sometimes partially covered for patients for whom an overhanging eyelid impedes perfect vision, but not for purely cosmetic reasons.)

As is the case with an increasing number of plastic surgeons, Dr. Stout's office also offers lasers and injectible anti-aging procedures. When asked pointedly about who performs the procedures, he advised, "I perform an initial consultation with a patient to determine an optimal treatment plan, which may involve laser resurfacing, Botox, Restylane, or other injectible fillers or relaxers. This includes precise settings of the laser machine. The treatment is carried out by the nurse, and I am always in the office to view the results and review the treatment plan." (Dr. Stout will personally perform the procedure for patients who so desire.) Often, Dr. Stout advises, these treatments are administered in conjunction with ophthalmic surgery; as always, it is the needs, budget, and outcomes desired by the individual patient that dictate the combination of procedures undergone.



Dr. Robert Guida, a Manhattan plastic surgeon who's been featured in New York Magazine's annual Best Doctor's issue six years in a row, is a strong advocate of CO2 lasers, especially the new UltraPulse Encore- a new generation of the UltraPulse machine. Older CO2 lasers were effective, but downtime and redness could last weeks or even months.

The new UltraPulse Encore is not only more effective than the old CO2 laser, but downtime is limited to days instead of weeks. With two primary components - **Actice FX** for brown spots and fine lines, and the **Deep FX** for deeper lines and

tightening of the skin- this machine's dual efficacy is appealing to many patients.

"While a laser does not take the place of a face lift, for patients in their forties, fifties and sixties, this can be a cost-effective and treatment-effective alternative to a full or partial lift, as both resurfacing and tightening are achieved," says Guida.

For an eye-area treatment, you can expect to pay about \$1,000 for a permanent procedure that will have you back in the office in 1-2 days. A full face and neck treatment can run \$4-5,000, depending on the surface covered; it can be done in-office in about an hour, lasts forever (as long as the sun is avoided and sunscreen is worn daily) and downtime runs about 3 days. Take note, however: while some practices advertise this as a "lunch-hour" procedure, recovery time can take up to a week depending on the depth of the treatment and the patient's skin type.

We also talked to Elliot Jacobs, M.D., a plastic surgeon with offices on Park Avenue. "There are a lot of medical people who do cosmetic procedures, both invasive and non-invasive; these include gynecologists and dentists who take weekend courses. As a plastic surgeon with 25 years experience, however, I can offer patients non-surgical treatments when those are indicated and also have the ability to advise patients that, "What you need now is something more."

"The "more" would include procedures- such as eyelifts or facelifts- that no amount of non-surgical treatment is going to equal. Thus, they have the opportunity to explore the full spectrum of available treatments, rather than a piecemeal consideration; other medical specialists are limited as to what they can offer."

Dr. Jacobs advises, "There are many patients I've seen beginning with treatments for lasers and injectibles, then carry them through to anti-aging plastic surgeries as these are required." The point here is that you may wish to establish a rapport with a doctor whom you trust, one who knows your skin as it ages and can treat you over time with the confidence and vision that a long-term patient-doctor relationship can bring.

Additionally, Dr. Jacobs maintains, "Gravity and environmental issues take their toll; while some procedures, some injectibles and lasers can maintain or somewhat reverse aging, at some point surgery is required to retain the most youthful appearance possible."

This said, there are effective "lunchtime procedures" that can do much to reverse the effects of aging. Dr. Jacobs performs a unique in-office eyelift combo using Botox and fillers. Here, Botox is injected into specific areas, such as crow's feet. Then, a small number of tiny injections in the lower eyelid skin "will diminish muscle activity and lines (though not take away fat bags), and a touch of Botox under the lateral tail of the eyebrow will lift the brow and diminish lines in that area. At the same time, Dr. Jacobs uses a filler such as Restylane in the upper eyelid tissue under the brow to restore the youthful volume there."

Honesty is key: "Part of my job is to be honest and tell people what can and can't be accomplished. But for many people in middle age, this is a wonderful alternative to plastic surgery- and the downtime is nil." Restylane lasts (*continued*)

up to 8-12 months, but Botox has to be redone every four months; the cost of this lunchtime procedure is about \$1500.

Again, seeing pictures of a doctor's work or first-hand recommendations are always important in your selection of a practitioner. "A lot of what we're talking about is available to many doctors; it's in the skill of the doctor him/herself that can make the difference since everyone has access to the same products."

MORE NOVEL USES...

Dr. Jacobs has initiated several novel uses of Botox to target problem areas. Among these: "I have used very minute doses of Botox at the margin of the upper and lower lips to diminish fine smokers' lines (which can also occur in nonsmokers thanks to heredity). You can also use Botox to decrease the downturn at the corners of the mouth. I also use Botox on the neck to soften prominent neck cords that are the result of underlying muscles. Also, some people, especially men, have sweaty palms. Botox can stop the sweating, though it needs to be injected every four months for optimal effect. Because this procedure uses a good amount of Botox, the cost runs about \$1500.

Juvederm and Radiesse also have interesting uses: Dr. Jacobs utilizes them to correct a crooked nose: "There are artistic ways in which you can reshape the nose with these injections, to seemingly correct the deviation. You can also soften a bump on the nose with these fillers, though you may also be making the nose a little bit larger in the process." One session lasts about a year and costs about \$650 to \$1,000.

Sculptra, known for facial wasting, can be used not only for cheeks and temples, but can also strengthen certain portions of the face, such as building up cheekbones or adjusting weak chins. Dr. Jacobs has also used Sculptra and Radiesse on the surfaces of hands to mask prominent veins. Typically, this lasts about 18 months and runs around \$1,500.

Lastly, Dr. Jacobs shares news on two new injectibles. **Elevesse** is a hyaluronic acid that contains lidocaine, "so it doesn't hurt as much, since it numbs as it's injected." He's even more excited about a new injectible filler: "**Evolence** handles much more nicely than Juvederm; I can do more superficial lines on the surface of the skin, and can work at a higher level, closer to the skin's surface, without risking a bump, which can occur when you're injecting too close to the skin surface." Costs are similar to that of the two most commonly used fillers, Restylane and Juvederm.



Cosmetic procedures have come a long way and new products and procedures are being developed every week. If you're considering elective cosmetic procedures, make sure to find a good doctor and discuss all questions and concerns you have beforehand. ■

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