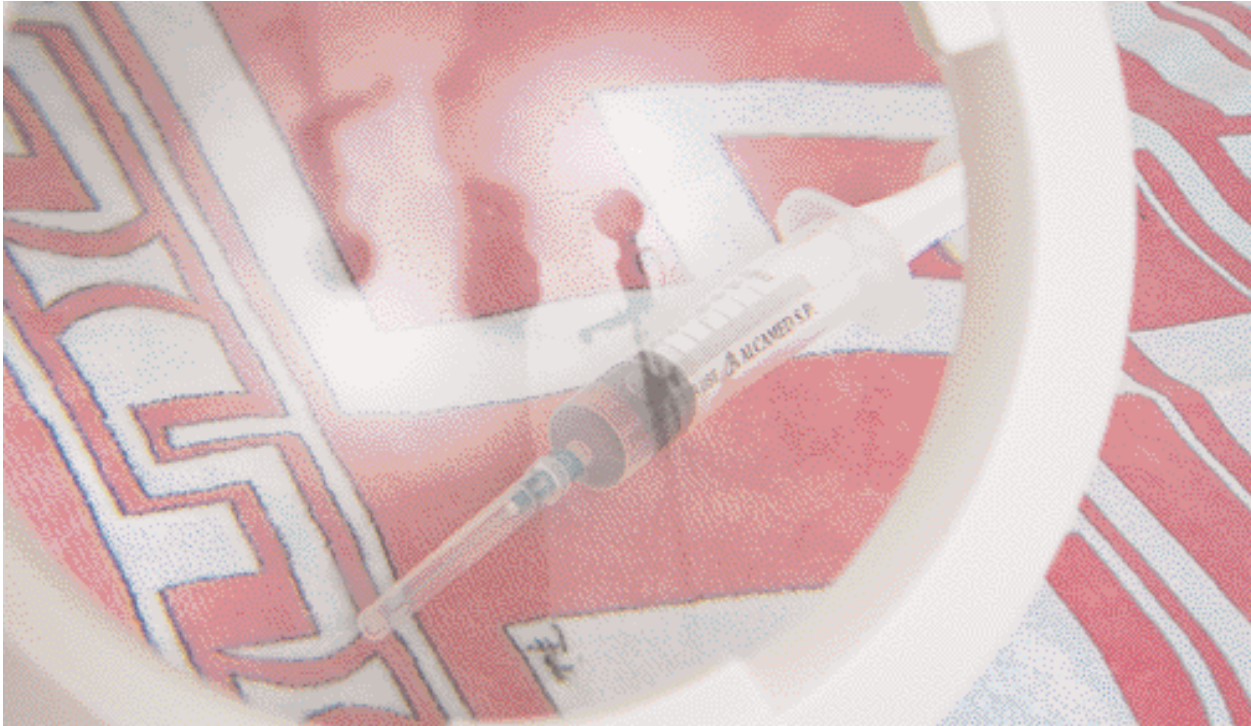


To Botox or not to Botox

HOW SAFE ARE BOTOX INJECTIONS – AND WHAT ARE THE ALTERNATIVES?



One of the world's most popular cosmetic procedures, Botox has been getting a lot of media attention in recent months, and much of it hasn't been good. Both Health Canada and the US Food and Drug Administration put Botox under review in February over safety concerns. Two months later, the press seized on a study suggesting that botulinum neurotoxin type A might migrate from its injection site to the brain.

Whether or not Botox side effects turn out to be more than just the "frozen face syndrome," some are beginning to wonder if alternatives might be a safer bet. "Botox Cosmetic has been used on several million people without problems," says Dr. D.J. Verret, facial plastic surgeon. "But because of the press, some patients are asking for alternatives."

No stranger to plastic surgery, actress Demi Moore has made it known that she prefers to forego Botox treatments in favor of blood-sucking leeches. Fortunately, it's not just medieval medicine that offers options to those looking for a way to fight the march of time.

At present, Botox is the only muscle paralytic approved for cosmetic use, though others are in the trial phase and could be on the market in six months to a year. In the meantime, fillers, laser skin resurfacing, SurgiWire and even microdermabrasion all offer slightly different ways of attaining a more youthful look. "The major thing to remember is that none of it is necessary," says Verret. "The key is getting patients to sit down and figure out what they're really concerned about, so the physician is better able to assess what can be done."

While collagen is decreasing in popularity, the newer hyaluronic acid fillers are gaining ground, according to statistics from the American Society of Plastic Surgeons. Instead of acting on the muscles as Botox does, these do exactly as their name suggests: they fill the creases that the years have

worn into the skin. While not effective on crow's feet, they do work on frown lines and the lines that run from the nose to the mouth.

One of the great advantages of hyaluronic acid fillers is that they can be dissolved with enzymes, so the results are reversible if a patient isn't happy. Though the cost is about double, the effects of these fillers will last twice as long as with Botox, so that should translate into fewer trips to the doctor.

But there are those who simply prefer not to have foreign substances injected into their bodies, meaning fillers and Botox are both out. SurgiWire, which has been around for a couple of years, uses a metal wire to cut through the fibrous matter between the skin and muscle and then uses the patient's own fat as filler. This procedure is effective for the same areas as the fillers as well as for deep acne scars. Compared to Botox, SurgiWire is pricey – about four times more expensive – but since the results are meant to be lasting, it might be worth the investment.

Laser skin resurfacing or microdermabrasion might be options to consider for those wanting something even less invasive. Microdermabrasion can help with fine lines or acne scars, but is really more of an exfoliating treatment that will help give the skin a more youthful glow. According to Verret, laser therapy is a good bet for tackling wrinkles and fine lines, including those dreaded crow's feet, but it won't be much help on the deep frown lines.

Of course, as with any procedure, all of these entail a certain measure of risk. It's important to do the research and find the right physician beforehand. And if all of it seems like just a little bit too much, perhaps a lesson from reformed Botox user turned goji berry enthusiast Victoria Beckham, who now professes to count on a healthy diet to guard her youthfulness, might be the way to go. Just don't expect the results to be quite so dramatic.

Kirsten Vance