

Newslinks for the week of December 10th:

The New York Times

SKIN DEEP

Hold the Chemicals, Bring on the Needles

By NORA ISAACS

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JANE BECKER, a composer and solo pianist, celebrated her 50th birthday at the dermatologist, paying \$1,500 for shots of Restylane and [Botox](#). But three months later, their wrinkle-smoothing effects wore off. So, she turned to a less-artificial youth tonic: facial acupuncture.

Like many women who have tried acupuncture in pursuit of beauty, Ms. Becker hoped that having needles strategically inserted into her face would be cheaper and last longer than her birthday injections.

Ms. Becker, now 53, started with 10 sessions in five weeks (\$1,000) and has gone for monthly maintenance since (\$105 a session).

Acupuncture didn't end up being much of a bargain, but it pays in other ways, she said.

"I can really see a difference in my face," said Ms. Becker, who sees Steven Sonmore, a licensed acupuncturist in Minneapolis. "It looks younger, smoother, brighter and uplifted."

Early adopters like Ms. Becker first spread word of the virtues of a so-called acupuncture face-lift. Then before the 2005 Academy Awards, a crew of facial acupuncturists descended on Soho House, a makeshift celebrity hangout in Los Angeles, and A-listers jumped at the chance to transform their skin from the inside out.

Now, thanks to more robust marketing, cosmetic acupuncture has caught the attention of more of the wrinkled public. Its holistic approach appeals in particular to women who want to slow signs of aging, but don't want to undergo surgery or to inject chemicals.

Whether it is called facial rejuvenation, acupuncture face-lift or cosmetic acupuncture, the aim is to tackle wrinkles, muscle tension that may be causing unsightly lines, as well as systematic issues standing between you and glowing skin. Just as with traditional

needling, putting needles on acupuncture points stimulates the body's natural energies, called qi, but with added benefits.

Whether cosmetic acupuncture works has yet to be proved. Some randomized, controlled studies have shown that acupuncture is an effective adjunctive treatment for hypertension, chronic pain, headaches and back pain. But there is no peer-reviewed research demonstrating that acupuncture diminishes wrinkles.

Still, an industry devoted to needling for youthful skin has grown in recent years.

"There's a rise in interest all over the country," said Martha Lucas, a licensed acupuncturist who helped create the Mei Zen cosmetic acupuncture system in 2003. She teaches a dozen seminars annually to rooms of more than 30 budding facialists. "L.A. used to be the biggest market. But now we get people from the Midwest calling."

Practitioners of this style of cosmetic acupuncture called Mei Zen ("beautiful person" in Chinese) offer their services in 16 states.

Mary Elizabeth Wakefield, a licensed acupuncturist who headed the 2005 Oscars event, has trained more than 2,000 teachers in 40 states in her technique: constitutional facial acupuncture. This year to date, she has trained almost 1,200 practitioners, up from 100 in 2001, she said. "For centuries, the ancient Chinese have promoted health and beauty," Ms. Wakefield said, "but we've taken it to another level."

Part of the reason is savvier marketing: Ms. Lucas's monthly seminars include pointers on taking effective before-and-after pictures, and creating fruitful relationships with dermatologists. She even passes out T-shirts that proclaim "Cosmetic Acupuncture Works." A half-dozen women interviewed for this article said they have seen puffiness decrease, under-eye bags disappear and lines diminish or soften.

Dr. Richard G. Glogau, a clinical professor of dermatology at University of California, San Francisco, said these changes were quite possible. "It's obvious that people carry around a lot of muscle tension in their face, which gives them frowns and wrinkles," he said. "My take on this is that they are producing relaxation in the muscles."

But Dr. Glogau doesn't believe that facial acupuncture can increase collagen, another claim of some practitioners.

During a recent session at the Claremont Resort and Spa in Berkeley, Calif., Andy Seplow, a licensed acupuncturist, told me as much as he used tweezers to guide tiny needles into a deep wrinkle between my eyebrows.

A needle penetrating the dermis would create damage, Dr. Glogau agreed, and the body would respond by producing collagen.

But does the doctor think the procedure could get rid of wrinkles? “My general understanding is that acupuncture really just involves a handful of punctures,” he said. “It’s unlikely that you will get significant collagen production from that.”

That said, holding tension in one’s jaws or brows can make a face appear strained. I am a teeth grinder with a tight jaw. Mr. Seplow inserted needles into my jaw area to relax it. He also assessed my systemic issues. Red blotches above my cheeks, he said, were a sign of sluggish digestion, so he put needles into my feet and legs for this.

Many cosmetic acupuncturists pride themselves on their holistic service. “The way I look at it, your health is reflected in your skin,” said Anita Lee, a licensed acupuncturist who has a private practice that specializes in women’s health in Manhattan. Because acupuncture facials improve circulation and unblock stuck energy, Ms. Lee said, “they help people heal from the inside out.”

One kind of cosmetic acupuncture incorporates microcurrents. Dr. Peter G. Hanson, a licensed acupuncturist, uses a machine which has probes that connect with facial needles to deliver bursts of microcurrent. He first used this method to stimulate the facial nerves in patients with conditions like Bell’s palsy, which involves paralysis of the face. But Dr. Hanson soon realized it could help his middle-age clients, too. The current, he said, tones and increases the volume of underlying muscles, which “makes the skin young again.”

Not likely, said Dr. Richard D’Amico, the president of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons.

“First of all, increasing tone does not increase muscle volume,” said Dr. D’Amico, an assistant clinical professor of plastic surgery at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine. And “anything that stimulates muscles will cause skin to fold even more and the wrinkles will get worse.”

The doctors clearly disagree. “If you don’t exercise the face muscles, you’ll get more wrinkles,” Dr. Hanson said.

For some, acupuncture facials serve as a back door into alternative medicine. Sheila Schmidt, 35, a telecom consultant from Denver, started facial acupuncture after noticing crow's feet. They diminished, but she still goes for sessions. "I leave feeling more balanced and less anxious," she said.

Ms. Becker, too, has come to think of her acupuncture facials as a kind of preventive medicine. "If I have any stress on my kidneys, liver and spleen, it shows up on my face," she said. "Keeping my systems healthy is a win-win all around."

Los Angeles Times

1st face transplant patient makes progress

Isabelle Dinoire of France received a new nose, chin and lips in 2005. Her improvement -- she can manage a slight smile -- may boost the prospects for future transplant patients.

By Denise Gellene, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer
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Eighteen months after receiving a new nose, chin and lips, the world's first face transplant recipient has recovered enough use of her facial muscles to close her lips and draw her face into a slight smile, doctors in France reported Wednesday.

The patient, Isabelle Dinoire, who was 38 when the transplant was performed in 2005, has overcome two tissue-rejection episodes and two cases of kidney failure -- a side effect of the powerful drugs she must take to prevent her immune system from rejecting the facial graft.

Dinoire, who bears thin scars where her new face was attached, is satisfied with her appearance and says she is not afraid of walking in the street or meeting people, her doctors reported in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

Her case shows that a face transplant is technically feasible and may one day become an option for badly disfigured patients willing to assume related health risks, said Dr. David M. Young, assistant professor of plastic surgery at UC San Francisco, who has been drawing up plans for a face transplant.

"Everyone in the world said this should not be done because the world was not ready and the risks were too high," Young said. The French medical team "has beaten the odds."

Dinoire, who has two daughters, became badly disfigured when her pet Labrador chewed off the lower part of her face while she was unconscious after taking sleeping pills. Her nose and lips were missing, and the attack left her teeth and lower jawbone exposed.

Before Dinoire received the transplant from a brain-dead donor, food dripped from her mouth and she wore a surgical mask in public.

The procedure brought criticism from some in the medical community because the health risks associated with the transplant were high and Dinoire's injuries were not life-threatening. She faces lifelong treatment with immunosuppressant drugs and the persistent worry that her immune system may reject the graft. The drugs bring the added risk of kidney failure and increase the chance of infection and cancer.

Lead author Dr. Jean-Michel Dubernard, a member of Dinoire's transplant team in Lyon, France, said plastic surgery was not an alternative for his patient because it would have been "nearly impossible" to sculpt a new nose and lips.

"She now has a human face," he said. "If she wanted to kiss someone, she could."

Six months after the transplant, Dinoire could detect heat, cold and touch in the grafted skin, her doctors noted in their report. By 10 months, she could completely close her mouth. A video released with the report showed Dinoire producing a partial smile and pronouncing words that contain the letters B and P, which required her lips to touch.

Compared with Dinoire's appearance before the accident, her face looks round and puffy -- a possible side effect of her anti-rejection medicines -- and slightly asymmetrical.

Besides the two cases of kidney failure, her anti-rejection drugs caused anemia, high blood pressure and low platelet counts. Dinoire's condition slowly improved after treatment and a change in her medication, her doctors said in their article, which details the first 18 months of her recovery after her November 2005 surgery.

Dr. Maria Siemionow, director of plastic surgery research at the Cleveland Clinic, said

the report underscored a need for less toxic anti-rejection drugs.

Dinoire suffered more complications than are typically seen in patients who get abdominal skin grafts after cancer surgery or in the few patients who have received hand transplants, she noted, an outcome "that may be specific to facial grafts."

A lingering question hanging over the procedure is whether the patient has psychologically adjusted to her new face, Siemionow said.

Dinoire received regular psychological support during the first four months after her surgery but has not been given a formal psychiatric evaluation, the report said.

"They are telling us she is happy, but she has not undergone testing," Siemionow said. "They are giving us the functional results, but it would be very good for us to know the psychological outcome."

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Wrinkle Cream Not Working? Give Me Two More Jars

The less effective a beauty product or treatment, the more likely women are to keep using it.

That's what researchers found after interviewing nearly 300 women, ages 27 to 65, who were trying to achieve a more youthful appearance by using creams, vitamins and other beauty treatments. Surprisingly, women were more loyal to products and treatments when they didn't work than when they did.

Researchers from the [University of Bath](#), in England, and Qatar University studied women who had used various beauty treatments in the past year. The majority of the women had used anti-aging skin care and moisturizing products as well as vitamins. About half had used salon anti-aging treatments, and about a third had adopted special diets. About 3 percent had medical treatments such as Botox or chemical peels.

They found that among women who felt that the treatments were not working, only 27 percent had stopped using the products; the rest said they wanted to continue using them. But among women who felt the treatments were successful, 55 percent had stopped using them.

Why would a successful beauty treatment spur more quitters than one that failed? The reason may be that when people don't feel good about themselves, fear is a more powerful motivator than success, say the researchers. Fears about looking older spur women to keep trying even when products don't work. But once they have success, such as younger-looking skin, their anxiety dissipates, and they stop worrying about it.

"This study is more evidence for the belief that when someone is thinking negatively about themselves, and they try and fail to improve their situation, they will be motivated to try again," said Rana Sobh, of Qatar University's College of Business. "How women imagine themselves in the future has a strong effect on how motivated they are to keep using a product or service such as creams or other treatments for aging."

Other studies have shown a similar effect for men who use gym equipment. In that research, the fear of looking bad was a more powerful motivator than the hope of looking good.

University of Bath marketing professor Brett Martin said that attitudes change as people become happier with their bodies. People who are happy with themselves and in a more positive frame of mind are more strongly motivated by success than failure.