



## Take Some Needling

With cosmetic care professionals, youth is just a poke away. by Janine S. Pouliot

**B**e honest. Haven't you ever walked past a mirror and, when you thought nobody was watching, tugged back the loose skin on your face so that you suddenly appeared smoother and wrinkle-free? It's a kick to see what you'd look like without those telltale aging signs. Maybe you're not ready for a facelift or you're simply too young for one. But those lines and wrinkles... they really do get under your skin, so to speak. Alas, you release your grip on your skin and move on. Ah... wishful thinking.

Well, wishes *do* come true. These days,

you *can* look younger without going under the knife. There are plenty of products called cosmetic facial fillers that can, with a simple plunge of a syringe, wipe years off your face almost instantaneously. And they are more effective than ever before.

"Several years ago these products were thought of as just line- and wrinkle-fillers," says Dr. Ken Dembny, a plastic surgeon with Cosmetic & Plastic Surgery Specialists in Wauwatosa. "But as we age, there are lots of changes in the lower face, such as loss of volume. As a result, there's been a shift from using fillers just for lines and

wrinkles to restoring facial volume." And the results have been surprisingly good.

"When you use a large amount of filler, you look just like you had a facelift," says Carol VanZelst, who holds a doctorate in natural medicine and owns ANEW Skin and Wellness in Brookfield. "You can fill in areas of the face that get loose or descend. The filler lifts the skin back up and tightens it at the same time." That's a whole lot of improvement without a whole lot of downtime from surgery.

But given the wide number and diverse types of fillers out there, it can be confusing for consumers to know what to ask for. Or even what, exactly, needs to be done to achieve the desired look.

"Our choice of fillers has expanded significantly over the last year or two, as has our experience," says Dr. Christopher Knuth, medical director of Aspen Medical Aesthetics and Laser Clinic in Mequon. "We now have more and better options. Each filler does some things well. But more options means better results."

Given this wider playing field, what patients think they want isn't necessarily what's best for them. The key to arriving at the best possible solution is in the all-important consultation between provider and patient.

"People come in and ask, 'What should I do?'" says VanZelst. "I say 'No, you tell me what you want.'" Once VanZelst knows the areas of the face that are of concern, she can prescribe a course of action. "People often have an idea of what they think is wrong with their face," she says, "but when I look at what they're talking about, I see a different approach." For example, a lot of patients see VanZelst about the nasolabial folds, those deep lines running from the edge of the nose to the mouth. So, as expected, they ask for a filler to correct them. But what's really causing that wrinkle may be a relaxation of the elasticity of the cheek. "That's why we fill in the cheek," VanZelst says. "You can really sustain a look by using these fillers."

It might nonetheless be a bit scary to think of a substance being injected directly into the face. What if it migrates from your cheek to, say, your chin? Not a chance, explains Dr. Paul W. Loewenstein, a plastic surgeon with Greater Milwaukee Plastic Surgeons in Brookfield. "The skin has



a very tight weave of collagen and elastin fibers." He offers this analogy: "Think of your skin as a blanket. You can place your hand under a blanket and move it anywhere. But if you were to place your hand directly into the weave of the blanket, it could not move." And that's exactly how these injectables work. They aren't going anywhere other than the precise spot where they are placed.

But what about the body's rejection of the material itself? "The fillers are naturally occurring substances that are the exact

underlying muscle activity." Years of simply exercising those muscles can lead to furrows that carve a roadmap across your upper face. The muscles need to be quieted down in order to iron out those creases.

By contrast, fillers do not impact the facial muscles themselves, but work by providing volume and often stimulating the production of the body's own collagen. "The marionette lines, which run from

each side of the mouth to the chin, are really a result of loss of volume in the cheek, loss of elasticity in the skin or underlying bone loss associated with aging," Dembny says. "They are not attributed to muscle activity." And that's where the new age of fillers comes in.

One class of injectable is hyaluronic acid (HA). It's marketed under the brand names Juvéderm, Perlane and Restylane.

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same amino acid substance as the body," Loewenstein says. "The body does not recognize it as foreign." As a result, the immune system is not working to remove the strange material from its territory.

And that is one big advantage of today's fillers. An earlier generation of injectable derived from bovine collagen had its problems. There was, explains Loewenstein, the possibility of an allergic reaction. "Everyone had to be tested, although less than 5 percent of patients were actually allergic. I wasn't that happy with collagen injections."

Nowadays, what's inside that syringe can be any number of different fillers intended for specific effects. Just about everyone has heard of Botox, and this particular category of injectable is quite different than the others. "Botox is a muscle-relaxer rather than a volume filler," says Dembny. "Wrinkles in the upper third of the face, such as frown and forehead lines or crow's feet, are associated with aging, but also have to do with

"Hyaluronic acid is a clear gel that can be utilized both superficially in the skin and in the deeper layers of skin," says Dembny. It's excellent for lip augmentation as well as for unsightly lines.

"My favorite is Juvéderm Plus for lips," notes VanZelst. "Regular Juvéderm does not have the thickness and I only use that for fine lines. Juvéderm Plus is the thicker of two. It's easier to inject and massage into place with no lumps or bruising. It's really remarkable."

For more pronounced deep furrows like the nasolabial folds, hydroxylapatite, marketed under the name Radiesse, is often preferred. "It's a calcium product of the same natural component found in teeth and bones," explains Knuth. "The nice thing about it is it's well-

match fillers to treat the whole face," says Dembny. "They can be used to enhance procedures such as chemical peels, laser resurfacing, intense pulsed light photorejuvenation."

Loewenstein agrees: "You can use fillers to supplement surgery. You can do both."

What's more, the use of injectables isn't limited to the face. "People are often concerned about the signs of aging on their face, but they forget about the backs of their hands," says Dembny. "Hands also show aging and can be a giveaway." Typical age indications include brown spots, thin inelastic skin, prominent veins and a general bony appearance. "There are treatments to improve and correct this," Dembny notes. "Injectables work to provide volume and give back that smooth,



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tolerated and doesn't require allergy testing. Mixed with a small amount of hyaluronic acid as a vehicle to deliver the calcium, the HA metabolizes and leaves the calcium behind. You get the bulk effect from the calcium itself and, over months, you also get the collagen building around the calcium."

The outcome is gratifying. Patients appear to have recaptured a youthful fullness and softness in their faces, erasing that hangdog look so indicative of old age. But it isn't so obvious that anyone will suspect you've done a thing. "Surgery does give you dramatic results," points out Knuth. "But you have to ask yourself if that's what you really want. Fillers can provide incremental improvements."

The result is that nobody can figure it out. "People might ask if you are well-rested or have lost weight," Knuth says. "They can't put their finger on why you look better."

But what's really great about injectables is that they don't force patients into an either/or decision. "You can mix and

plump look of youthful hands. Injections in the hand also last longer than in areas of the face."

Which brings us to the question of how long this stuff really lasts. "It depends on where and how it's placed," says Dembny. Longevity is also impacted by each individual's genetic makeup. But in general, estimates for hyaluronic acids range around six months, according to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons. Hydroxylapatite can last quite a bit longer.

"I have the impression that injectables stick around longer than what the company [that manufactures it] says," notes Loewenstein. "I go to inject seven or eight months later and I can still feel something there."

These days, maintaining a youthful appearance has become almost ridiculously easy. For those willing to go the injectable route, the options are wide open. ■

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