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Aging defensively

They're too young to go under the knife, writes Deirdre Kelly, but old enough to worry about maintaining their edge in a youth-saturated society. That's why today's twentysomethings are taking pre-emptive strikes against wrinkles with an arsenal of new procedures. But at what cost?



You're 25. You look good. But why look good when you could look much, much better with the help of a cosmetic surgeon.

So you make the call. Why not? Everyone is doing it. Wrinkle management is the new mantra of a culture obsessed with youth, and you chant it all the way to the doctor's office. It's already crowded with people like you, waiting on their lunch hours to preserve the best face of their lives with line fillers, muscle relaxers and other injectables that are updating the pursuit of ageless beauty.

Welcome to Generation Botox, so called because botulinum toxin type A, nature's most potent blocker of nerve impulses, is their therapy of choice. Other weapons in the new anti-aging arsenal include microdermabrasion, chemical peels, laser resurfacing, and collagen and microfat injections.

Too young to go under the knife yet old enough to start worrying about maintaining their edge in a youth-saturated society, today's twentysomethings are looking increasingly to cosmetic non-surgery for a quick fix without the scars and sutures.

Want a closer look? Here's the demographic: Predominantly female, ranging from mid-20s to early 40s, in command of

enough disposable income to afford therapies that can cost up to \$3,500.

Treatments range from twice yearly Botox injections to freeze the frown lines on a needy face (up to \$600 a shot) to Artecoll, an injectable consisting of bovine collagen and tiny plastic beads that plump the skin for long-lasting results (\$700), and laser therapy for erasing pigmentation spots and broken capillaries (about \$300 for a 15-minute session; a minimum of three sessions recommended.)

"Where I live, where I work, where I socialize – everywhere there's this pressure to look younger, to be perfect," says 25-year-old Nissrien Barakat of Toronto, who has been getting Botox injections since she was 22. "You kind of feel you need to keep up."

"Young people are attacking aging with a vengeance," says Dr. Stephen Mulholland, founder of SpaMedica, a one-stop Toronto cosmetic surgery and skin-care clinic. "They're taking prophylactic strikes to put off the traditional signs of age and loss of vitality."

That is a change from their parents' generation, who traditionally waited until their 40s or 50s before considering cosmetic surgery. Today, twentysomethings "want to perpetuate and maintain that youthful sense of immortality by tackling things early."

But part of the appeal of the new procedures is that, unlike a face-lift, most are non-invasive. Less dramatic, they are perhaps easier to rationalize. "The non-surgical procedures are showing a growth of about 10 per cent a year," says Dr. Greg Waslen, a member of the Toronto-based Canadian Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (CSAPS) and director of Calgary's Plastic Surgery Centre.

"It's all part of the self-improvement business," Waslen says. "People want to look good and they are spending the money to do so."

But at what price?

"The very easy consumption of cosmetic surgery affects the majority of women negatively," says Carla Rice, co-coordinator of the Body Image Project at Sunnybrook and Women's College Health Sciences Centre in Toronto. "The ideals of beauty become even more perfect and more difficult to achieve, so the standard gets raised. More women feel inadequate. Being normal and looking attractive just isn't good enough."

Rice worries that if you start in your 30s with little touchups, what do you do at 55? When everyone else is doing it, can you ever afford to stop? "Because the procedure is readily available," she says, "if you don't but it, it reflects badly on your character. Many

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people will see it as a form of self-care, and if you're not doing it, why not?

So many women are already on board that, according to the CSAPS, Botox, a product whose cosmetic use was discovered by Dr. Jean Carruthers of Vancouver and approved in the spring by Health Canada, is the most popular of the new therapies. Also hot are wrinkle fillers like Restylane and Perlane, and following right behind are the new injectables like Reviderm and Redifil, which are manufactured molecularly, thus reducing the risk of allergic reactions.

Botox injections and other non-surgical fixes can also be completed in a doctor's office in less than an hour, good news for youth worshippers who don't want any impediments to their right to party.

And party is what is taking place in some surgeon's offices, where the relative ease of the new therapies inspires giddiness in those shooting up line smoothers. In an article in the latest issue of Harper's Bazaar titled Plastic Surgery Parties, a group of young professional women, ranging in age from 26 to 36, are shown sipping tea and nibbling sushi in the Manhattan office of a dermatologic cosmetic surgeon while they wait their turn. They have come to mix pleasure with the fleeing pain of a Botox needle, dressed in Manolos and Gucci. "Though not one person in this youthful, beautiful, designer-clad pack looks like she needs surgical enhancement," the article says, "they have banded together regardless, in the name of perfection."

Dr. Trevor Born of the Toronto Institute of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery, which boasts a



Botox, the next fountain of youth

celebrity clientele, says this is a crowd that may avert more serious surgery in the future. He argues that using Botox now might actually ward off signs of aging. "Over time, it may actually reduce the need for surgical intervention," he says, "because it relaxes muscles that with habitual use could cause wrinkles in the first place."

Nissrien Barakat thinks it's worth the investment. She's determined to keep the aging process at bay at least until she's 50, which is when she might consider a face-lift.

"I don't plan on aging gracefully," she says. "I plan to look as young as I possibly can for as long as I can. And doing maintenance in my 20s is the best place to start."

Cosmetic nonsurgery, the top five

Microdermabrasion:

Removes excessive skin cells with a mechanical sloughing using fine aluminum crystals or diamond abrasion. Restores skin to a more youthful appearance with minimal downtime. \$150-\$350.

Chemical Peels:

Acid solutions that peel off the top layers to encourage regeneration of skin cells. Effective for wrinkles, acne scars and sun damage. Come in different strengths. Weak solutions offered by aestheticians called glycolic acid peels have almost no downtime. Physicians typically use stronger chemicals requiring one to two weeks of recovery. \$150 to \$1,000.

Laser Resurfacing:

Light beams vaporize small vessels and pigmentation spots or completely resurface the skin through the evaporation of skin cells to encourage new collagen growth. Recommended for pigmentation spots, pre-cancerous skin lesions, aging skin, acne scars and acne rosacea. A one-to-two week recovery period. \$500 to \$3,500.

Collagen:

A product produced from bovine collagen that is injected into the skin as a filler to plump fine line wrinkles and furrows around the lip, forehead, nose and eyes. Lasts three to six months. Trade names are Zyplast and Zyderm. Artecoll is collagen with micro spheres offering long-lasting results over two years. \$200 to \$750.

Hyaluronic acid:

A substance that binds collagen to the skin. Injected as a filler to plump fine line wrinkles around the mouth, eyes and forehead and for lip augmentation. Made molecularly with little or no possibility of allergy reactions and has trade names including Restylane, Perlane, Hylaform, Revifil and Reviderm. Lasts three to six months, except for Reviderm, which lasts up to two years. \$300 to \$750.

Botox Basics

What is: An intramuscular injection derived from a purified protein toxin, the same bacterium that causes botulism. A few drops are injected with a tiny needle into the muscle, blocking the nerve impulse from reaching that area. As the muscle weakens, the wrinkles in the skin gradually soften and often disappear, giving the face a more refreshed and relaxed look. Health Canada approved Botox for cosmetic use in the spring, helping to boost its popularity nationwide as a wrinkle treatment for patients 25 and up.

How it works: Temporarily paralyzes or freezes muscles that, on the face, are responsible for creating wrinkles from habitual use, for example crow's feet and deep lines between the eyes and lip area. When injected into neck cords, eliminates neck bulging.

Not just for wrinkles: Botox is enjoying an odd push as an alternative to antiperspirant, especially among celebs. When used on the underarms, soles or palms, it temporarily halts, unwanted perspiration by blocking neural messages to the brain. Wall Street guys are mad for it as a cure to sweaty palms, apparently. In Canada, TV's Designer Guys Steven Sabados and Chris Hyndman, visited Dr. Trevor Born in anticipation of last month's Gemini presentation where both were up for an award. "Both of us sweat profusely, and we didn't want to look nervous on stage," Hyndman says. Now, he doesn't sweat anymore – "the procedure relaxed me, totally." He is so impressed that he is hosting his own version of a Plastic Surgery party, for a group of friends, at Dr. Born's just in time for the holidays."

Results: Takes a couple of days to kick in and then lasts from four to six months, depending on the body's tolerance.

Side effects: Slight redness where the needle goes in, and potential bruising that fades with time. See an experienced Botox specialist, especially for injections below the eyes, around the mouth, the cheeks, the jaw line or the neck in those areas if not done accurately, the Botox can result in distortion of the mouth, droopiness of the cheeks or difficulty swallowing. The only people for whom Botox poses a serious risk are pregnant women. Most surgeons will have patients sign a waiver stating they are not pregnant before administering Botox.

Who: To find a registered specialist in your area, talk to your family doctor, or consult www.wrinkle.ca. For further information on Botox and other nonsurgical procedures, consult www.surgery.org.