

Botox

How it works: Naturally, your facial muscles are stimulated to contract by electrical impulses transmitted by a substance called acetylcholine. Over time these repeated contractions cause lines and wrinkles in the skin. Botox Botulinum Toxin Type A blocks the release of acetylcholine, so the muscle doesn't receive the message to contract. Once the muscles are unable to contract, the skin has less of a stimulus to wrinkle and becomes smoother.

The procedure: The area is wiped down with cleansing solution and Botox is then administered by injecting small amounts into the muscles of the face. This causes temporary paralysis so that the muscle cannot contract, thus removing lines and wrinkles. It is a quick and virtually painless process.

The result: It takes about a week for the Botox effect to kick in, giving a smoother, less lined, stress-free look. According to Nikolic, "the cosmetic use of Botox is constantly changing, depending on the effect one wants to achieve. With new injecting techniques and areas of application it is possible to lift the nasal tip, to lift breasts, the neck and face, as well as to reshape the eyebrow, and even to lift the corners of the mouth." The effects last for three to four months before a repeat is necessary. As the treatment wears off, the wrinkle will return.

Need to know: Some people develop redness or a slight swelling or bruising, but these usually pass within an hour or two. Botox has been used very successfully for over 20 years and is FDA approved. There is however still controversy as to whether or not it is potentially harmful.

Contra-indications: It has not been approved for those older than 65 years of age. The drug should not be used by pregnant women or by those who are breastfeeding. Avoid any stimulating activity for a few hours afterwards.

Cost: R1 100 for the eye area; R1 500 for the forehead.

Chemical peel

How it works: Chemical peels are solutions that improve and smooth the texture of the skin by dissolving damaged skin layers. They come in varying strengths and are recommended for the treatment of scarring, wrinkles and pigmentation. The majority of peels used are either alphahydroxy acids (AHAs), which are mild, trichloroacetic acid (TCA), which are medium to strong, or phenol peels, which are the strongest. Peels literally dissolve the surface layers of the skin, and the strength and time span of the peels determine how intensely they perform and the results achieved.

The procedure: Peels can be used in many concentrations. They take between five and 10 minutes to administer in the

doctor's rooms. The solution is swabbed over the face, whereafter you'll feel a tingling sensation (some doctors provide a fan to help minimise discomfort). The solution is then rinsed off. TCA and phenol peels are more intense, so although the procedure is much the same, they may require pre-treatment with Retin-A or AHA creams.

The result: Peels encourage cell renewal and are performed to enhance your skin's appearance, leaving a refreshed glow. They are also used to remove certain precancerous skin growths, to soften acne facial scars and to help control acne. After having a peel, it is common to experience flaking or scaling, and redness and dryness of the skin. These side-effects vary in severity

depending on the strength of the peel. Once the skin adjusts to the treatment and starts to heal, a fresher and improved skin texture results.

Need to know: Alphahydroxy acid (AHAs) formulas are best for people who can't spare the time to recover from a phenol or TCA peel. TCA peels result in some discomfort and mild swelling, followed by crusting and scabbing. Expect downtime of seven to 10 days. Phenol peels produce a deep peel, and are used to treat patients with deep facial wrinkles, or skin damaged by sun exposure. It is an intense process: your face swells, and your eyes may even be swollen shut temporarily. You may also be limited to a liquid diet and advised not to talk very much during the first few days of recovery. You can expect 10 to 14 days of scabbing, crusting and peeling before healing starts. You will need to arrange for someone to drive you home and help you out for a day or two if you are having a phenol or deeper TCA peel, as anaesthesia is required. With all peels sun protection is a must.

Contra-indications: Be aware that lines of demarcation may occur, since phenol sometimes lightens the treated areas. Your skin pigmentation may be a determining factor as to whether or not this is an appropriate treatment for you. Peels are not recommended for dark-skinned individuals. Phenol peels may pose a risk for patients with heart problems.

Cost: R380-R400 per treatment.

Intense Pulse Light therapy (IPL) & Bi-Polar Radiofrequency (BPRF)

How it works: A combination of light therapy and radiofrequency, "this combination treatment increases the light energy within the skin and allows for deeper penetration of this energy," says Nikolic. Heat is delivered into the deeper layers of the skin, which stimulates collagen