

ANTI-AGEING FOCUS



A woman's shoulder and back are visible on the left side of the page, adorned with several pink flowers. The background is a light, neutral color.

# { Before } { the knife }

When it comes to cheating the clock, many are choosing the aesthetic physician before the snip. By Jacqui Higgins

**A**nti-ageing treatments have come along in leaps and bounds. Our greater understanding of skin problems has enabled scientists to develop anti-ageing technologies that treat the skin using less extreme measures than surgery.

A few years ago, one would sneak off for a face lift, eye tuck and neck lift. These days, there are dozens of procedures that are fast becoming popular alternatives to going under the knife. The demand for aesthetic procedures like Botox, fillers and laser resurfacing, has seen a growth rate of between 25 and 30 percent each year. These non-surgical treatments offer less invasive solutions, delaying going for the snip, while making a noticeable difference to the look and feel of your skin. Here's the lowdown on the top non-surgical options on offer currently.

### Hyaluronic acid (filler injection)

**How it works:** Hyaluronic acid is found naturally in the skin, where it holds moisture in your cells while increasing elasticity, durability and radiance. Clear gel hyaluronic acid injections plump up the skin, fill in wrinkles and offer a youthful, refreshed look. Restylane is one of the most popular brands of fillers with medical professionals, and the new Juvederm Ultra has also been favourably received by experts.

Fillers are often a first step in anti-ageing procedures. “Fillers not only fill wrinkles but also replace what the skin has lost over time, improving the plumpness of the skin,” explains Buddy Niemann, from Renew Clinic in Durban and Johannesburg.

**The procedure:** Hyaluronic acid is injected into the skin at various points on the face as needed. A fine needle is used, which means minimal discomfort, and post-procedure bleeding and bruising.

“Because Juvederm ULTRA contains pain-reducing Lidocaine (a ‘built-in’ anaesthetic), the whole process is more comfortable,” says Niemann. The treatment takes between 30 and 40 minutes to administer, depending on the area being treated, and the effects should last up to a year.

**The result:** Fillers take effect immediately. In fact, there may be initial swelling of the treated area, although this settles fairly quickly (within 36 hours). A follow-up appointment is necessary to assess the results and provide a ‘top-up’ if need be. Some patients may experience swelling and/or bruising, “the incidence of which can be reduced by the use of light therapy 24 hours before the treatment and directly afterwards,” says Niemann. Using an ice pack will also help reduce swelling.

**Need to know:** The results of this treatment are dependant on the skill of the injector. There is no downtime, and you can continue with your normal activities immediately after treatment. Once opened, the whole vial must be used as it cannot be stored. The effects should last for a year.

**Cost:** Approximately R4 000 per vial.



### Fraxel laser treatment

**How it works:** The Fraxel non-ablative 1550 erbium-doped laser is a fractional laser that produces a large number of tiny columns or micro laser beams which penetrate the skin, while leaving portions of the skin intact between these beams. This unaffected skin allows for less downtime, fewer side-effects and increased healing.

**The procedure:** The area is thoroughly cleansed prior to the treatment, and a topical anaesthetic is applied approximately one hour before the procedure. The actual procedure takes between 20 and 25 minutes for a full face, and the anaesthetic is washed off immediately afterwards. How many treatments a patient will need depends on the condition and age of the skin, as well as the amount of sun damage incurred.

**The result:** Fraxel has a long-term benefit, repairing the skin from the deeper layers. The body's natural healing process is what allows the skin to replace imperfections and restore tighter tissue, giving a ‘fresher’ look. You can expect improvements in pore size, skin texture, brown spots, wrinkles and acne scars.

**Need to know:** Most patients need a series of treatments (two to six sessions). These are usually administered two to four weeks apart, until the desired result is achieved. After the treatment, your skin will feel sunburned, and you can expect some swelling. These symptoms will only last for a few hours with minimal discomfort thereafter. Your skin will be reddish pink for five to seven days afterwards, but this is a sign that it is healing. “Side-effects are limited to temporary redness and swelling, which usually lasts two to three days. This excellent side-effect profile and low downtime makes it one of the more attractive lasers,” says aesthetic medical practitioner, Dr Alek Nikolic.

**Aftercare:** Sunscreen is a must for several months after the treatment. If you're in direct sunlight, a wide-brimmed hat is advised.

**Contra-indications:** Avoid the use of Roaccutane in the six months preceding treatment. Patients with a history of herpes simplex virus (fever blisters) should use prophylaxis before, during and after treatment (five days).

**Cost:** Between R2 000 and R6 000 per session, depending on surface area treated.