

Your guide to anti-ageing without surgery

There's never been a better time to stop the clock, thanks to non-surgical treatments which actually work. Yet no one says they feel good, writes **Melinda Ayre** and **Kelly Baker**.

SURGEONS, COSMETIC doctors and dermatologists will tell you that this is a golden age as far as anti-ageing is concerned. And they're right. Cutting-edge treatments mean we no longer have to go under the knife in order to stay fresh and youthful-looking. Here, we examine the best treatments available, consider who they will benefit most and reveal just how much they hurt (both you and your wallet).

RELAX: Muscle freezers

Muscle relaxants, such as Botox and Dysport, are purified protein derivatives of botulinum toxin A. Contrary to popular belief, muscle freezers don't actually paralyse the muscle. "Both Botox and Dysport block the release of a chemical that signals muscle contraction. The muscle can't scrunch up, so skin doesn't wrinkle," explains Sydney cosmedical aesthetician, Dr Natalya Gontsova.

Muscle freezer Dysport has a slightly different composition to Botox, but compares well, says Deb Farnworth-Wood,

a Gold Coast skin clinic owner. She says that while Botox must be positioned carefully, "Dysport has more scope and clients report it lasts longer."

What's the procedure? Ice may be used to numb the area, then the muscle freezer is injected into facial muscles. The process about takes 15 minutes and afterwards you might see injection marks, bruising and swelling.

Results? In a few days, you'll notice less facial movement, with peak effect at 10 to 14 days. "You look refreshed for about eight weeks then the muscle 'freeze' gradually wears off," says Dr Gontsova.

She adds that results depend on expectations. "First-timers want softened lines, but some clients want a more frozen look, so I use more product, more often," says Dr Gontsova. Well-developed lines might still be visible after a treatment so "we offer a combination of fillers and muscle relaxant", says Dr Gontsova.

Side effects? "If muscle freezers are not administered precisely, skin can droop in places," warns Deb Farnworth-Wood. She stresses you must follow post-procedure instructions such as "not bringing heat ►

Women no longer have to go under the knife to fight the signs of ageing – a new age of cosmetic medicine is upon us.

© LAURA DOSS/CORBIS.

to the skin by exercising and not lying down for four hours after the treatment, in case the substance moves.” Dr Gontsova adds that breastfeeding or pregnant women should skip this treatment as “despite it being less than a drop of toxin, it does enter your bloodstream”. A lack of conclusive studies into the effects of muscle relaxant on pregnant women or breastfeeding mums means it’s best to be cautious.

Best for? Deb Farnworth-Wood recommends Dysport for crow’s feet, laugh lines and deep forehead lines. Botox is a brilliant wrinkle preventative, so if you have deep frown lines, but are still relatively young, you could try it. “Botox is our most popular treatment,” concedes Dr Gontsova, “most customers are 30 to 50, but the younger the skin, the better it responds and longer it lasts.”

DID YOU KNOW? Australian clinics use generic names such as “dermal fillers” because The Australian Therapeutic Goods Administration prevents clinics from advertising treatments by brand. Contact clinics individually to find out the brands they use.

FACT FILE

Feels like? “A sharp pinch on the forehead and a slightly more intense pinch around the eyes. Between the eyebrows is virtually pain-free. Some practitioners will offer ice to deal with the pain, but oddly, I find it hurts less without it. Of course, you can always just focus on the results – which are fabulous.”

Kelly Baker, Beauty Director



DYSPORT: \$9.90 per unit (brow about \$198), ozskin.com.
BOTOX: \$250 per area, christopherhanna.com.au.



CONTOUR: Skin tighteners

“The power of radio frequency is now being recognised,” says renowned Brisbane-based cosmetic medicine practitioner, Dr Mary Dingley. “The benefit of radio frequency [RF] is there’s less downtime – surface damage is reduced because skin is penetrated deeply.” In RF treatments, such as Thermage, Matrix RF and Pellevé, radio-frequency energy travels to sub-dermal layers. Ultherapy does the same, only with ultrasound. That energy is said to re-tighten collagen and boosts new collagen six months on.

What’s the procedure? During Pellevé, explains Melanie Yasin, a Sydney therapist, skin is cleansed, then the machine is passed over the face three times for 30-somethings and five times for over-50s. “Skin reaches 42 degrees then it’s cooled,” she says. “The heat boosts microcirculation and seals up pores for radiant texture.” RF is bearable – you feel hot bursts of energy. Powerful Matrix RF takes 20 minutes plus numbing cream, while anaesthetic-

free Thermage and Pellevé take 30 to 90 minutes. The new Thermage CTP has a vibrating tip for 25 per cent more efficiency and superior results.

Results? “Have Pellevé done on a Friday,” says Yasin, “because that night your skin will look amazing.” For 48 hours, skin is plump and glowing with petite pores. Months later, the skin beams with the benefits of gradual collagen renewal. For best results, try three treatments over four to six weeks.

Side effects? There might be redness, but usually “you can head straight back to work”, says Melanie Yasin. With Matrix RF, “sometimes microscopic dots are visible and skin might be puffy,” says Dr Dingley.

Best for? Matrix RF is excellent for acne scarring, while Thermage is terrific post-pregnancy and firms sagging skin on face, arms or tummy for 30- to 60-year-olds. Pellevé is a fabulous face firmer, but “don’t have it over 60 as you won’t get results”, says Melanie Yasin. >

FACT FILE

Feels like? “I’ve tried Thermage and Pellevé, and I can’t say I’ll be racing back to try either. Thermage is the most painful treatment I’ve ever experienced – despite popping an Ativan [anti-anxiety drug] a few minutes before the treatment. It’s difficult to explain the sensation, but if you imagine a deep, dull ache, then ramp it up by about a billion, you’re getting there. Pellevé was similar, only slightly less intense and I’m not convinced the results are worth the pain.” **KB**

THERMAGE Tummy, \$2200; full face, \$1800, christopherhanna.com.au.
THERMAGE CPT Full face \$3500, mdcosmedicalsolutions.com.au.
PELLEVÉ Full face, \$770; or three treatments for \$2000, allsaintscosmedical.com.au.
MATRIX RF Full face, \$600, cosmeticmedicinecentre.com.au.

© LAURA DOSS/CORBIS. GETTY IMAGES.

LIQUID LIFT: Fillers

Gel fillers, such as Juvéderm, Restylane and Mesolis, are made from water-loving hyaluronic acid (HA). HA is a natural sugar complex that summons water like a sponge. “A baby’s face looks juicy – that’s because their skin is so rich in hyaluronic acid,” explains Claire O’Mara, a Sydney clinical nurse. The biocompatible gels boost skin health, plump deep lines, augment lips and cheeks, and smooth out under-eye hollows.

Which filler is which? “With gel fillers, it depends on the particle sizes and how much the HA is cross-linked,” says Claire. More cross-linking means it’s more dense and rigid. Juvéderm is more rigid than Restylane, while Mesolis is very soft with non-cross-linked HA, which means “there’s no oomph to it”, explains Claire.

Best for? Each filler is suited to a specific area, says Claire. Juvéderm Ultra is perfect for lips “as it’s soft and juicy”, she says. Esthélis is perfect for under-eye circles because it has less structure and won’t puff up the area. Thicker fillers, such as Juvéderm Voluma, are ideal for plumping the cheeks, while Mesolis re-volumises and re-hydrates skin.

What’s the procedure? After a topical anaesthetic is administered, the gel is eased under your skin with a fine needle to replace lost volume. Injecting takes about 15 minutes and your physician may massage the area. Juvéderm and Restylane contain anaesthetic, so no numbing cream is required.

Results? Super-soft gels, such as Mesolis, flood your skin with hydration. The results are immediate and just get better over a few weeks. “I recommend you drink three litres of water a day for the first few days because it’s drawn to your skin and plumps skin up like a muffin rising in the oven,” says Claire. The more structured gels, such as Juvéderm or Restylane, plump lips for four to six months. Top-up procedures last longer, for about 12 to 18 months.

Side effects? Injection sites may be red and tender. ➤



“EACH FILLER IS SUITED TO A SPECIFIC AREA.”

FACT FILE

Feels like? “A big old pin prick with a whole lot of pulling and pushing as the product is massaged into place. The right technician will have a gentle hand, but some are downright brutal. Do your research and ask around before you take the plunge. Don’t be put off, however. A well-injected filler or two can take a decade off just like that – genius.” **KB**

JUVÉDERM \$650 per syringe, one syringe for lips and a few lines; cheeks, two syringes, christopherhanna.com.au.

MESOLIS \$415 per syringe, allsaintscosmedical.com.au.

RESTYLANE \$500-\$2000 per session, drmiroshnik.com.au.



BLOOD WORK

If synthetics don’t inspire, perhaps you would prefer the nourishing goodness of your own blood with a “vampire” facial. Platelet Rich Plasma Therapy (PRP) “uses the healing power of platelets in your own blood to boost skin quality,” says Dr Gavin Chan, a Melbourne cosmetic physician. “Platelets release growth factors to help heal wounds,” explains Dr Chan. From a sample of your blood, the platelets are concentrated, extracted, then re-injected into an area such as sun-damaged skin. Over a few months, tissue regeneration and collagen production are stimulated. “We often use it after laser resurfacing to accelerate healing,” says Dr Chan.

FACT FILE

Feels like? “Pretty much like it sounds, which is unpleasant. There are a whole lot of needles involved and, by the end of the treatment, you’ll never want to see another. Mind you, some swear by the results. Me? Not so convinced.” **KB**

PRP THERAPY Full face \$2500, thevictoriancosmeticinstitute.com.au.

© LAURA DOSS/CORBIS; GETTY IMAGES.

RESURFACE: Laser

“With lasers, it’s horses for courses,” says Dr Dingley. “We have 15 lasers that all do different things.” In laser treatments, such as Fraxel, the light moves down “in a pixel-like fashion, vaporising damaged skin cells”, she explains. “It stimulates collagen production and leaves microscopic areas of skin intact for faster healing.”

Dr Dingley explains that laser therapists must take care “because the greatest effect is on the skin’s surface”, she says. Yet she concedes that with treatments such as Intense Pulsed Light (IPL) there’s less room for error as they’re general rejuvenation tools, less specific than Fraxel. Fraxel has grades, including “a light, ‘dumbed down’ Fraxel for beauty therapy”, says Dr Dingley. Fraxel is a brand within Fractional CO2 “which is one of the most aggressive lasers and requires light sedative”, says Dr Dingley. A new gentle fractional resurfacing treatment from Fraxel, Clear + Brilliant, is getting impressive results with virtually no downtime.

What’s the procedure? Skin is prepped for an hour with numbing cream, then a teeny laser beam precisely covers a fraction of skin at a time to zap damaged cells. The actual zapping takes about 30 minutes and the laser feels like hot, hard slaps on the skin.

Results and side effects? You’ll need between two days to a week’s downtime, depending on the level of treatment. Expect redness, swelling and peeling. The next day, pigmentation is darker and skin texture is rough. Yet skin eventually recovers to crystal-clear texture. Dr Dingley adds that Fractional CO2 gives more firming action than Fraxel and peak results are in about five months. Clear + Brilliant has less downtime – just redness and dry, flaky skin for a day or two.

Best for? Fractional CO2 is ideal for crepey, sun-damaged skin on older patients. Fraxel Restore suits fine lines, pore refinement or stretch marks, while Fraxel Repair is best for melasma. Lighter Fraxel treatments work wonders on the décolletage. ■

When considering a cosmetic treatment, approach it in the same way you would a medical procedure.

FACT FILE

Feels like? “While I have not yet tried CO2 laser, I have indulged in both Fraxel and Fraxel Restore. I have had my décolletage, neck and also my face treated, and thanks to a liberal swathing of anaesthetic cream that was applied earlier, I chatted my way through the procedure. Afterwards, my skin felt hot and tight for an hour or two and, within a week, fine lines were softened and pigmentation was non-existent!” **KB**



FRAXEL Full face \$500 to \$750, theclinic.net.au.

FRAXEL RESTORE Full face \$1500, and FRAXEL REPAIR Full face \$4000, mdcosmedicalsolutions.com.au.

FRACTIONAL CO2 Full face \$2500, cosmeticmedicinecentre.com.au.

CLEAR + BRILLIANT Full face \$395 (four to six treatments), clearcomplexions.com.au.

WE LIKE

beautyheaven.com.au Your one-stop shop for beauty news, reviews and know-how.



HOW TO FIND A QUALIFIED THERAPIST

When considering a treatment, Dr Gabrielle Caswell, president of the Cosmetic Physicians Society Australia, suggests that you approach it like a medical procedure. “You don’t want to be getting laser while someone’s getting their nails done next door. Just because it’s cosmetic, doesn’t mean it’s not medical,” she says.

So what qualifications does someone need? Dr Caswell believes regulations in Australia are unacceptable. “In NSW and Victoria, for example, there’s nothing stopping a bricklayer buying an IPL device,” she says. “We’re very concerned about the risk consumers are exposed to.” Australia does have strict regulations on cosmetic injections, though. “Botox, Dysport and dermal fillers can only be prescribed by a medical practitioner, but injections can be administered by a registered nurse under the direct supervision of a doctor,” she says.

How do we avoid a botched procedure? First, Dr Caswell recommends visiting your GP for an opinion. “A doctor can identify problems like skin cancers and you’re entitled to a Medicare rebate for issues like rosacea.” Check medical credentials at ahpra.gov.au.

If your GP can’t recommend a cosmetic physician, visit cosmeticphysicians.org.au or “email us and we’ll find a good therapist in your area,” says Dr Caswell. The website lists doctors qualified in cosmetic and skin medicine. “An experienced cosmetic physician will have an established premises, indemnity insurance, after-hours support, trained technicians and will know what to do if a problem arises.”