

BEYOND BEAUTY

Is there a cosmetic treatment for your health concern?

Botox isn't just for wrinkles and lasers aren't just for baby-smooth skin. These so-called vanity treatments can also treat a host of health concerns, says Leah Hardy

YOU MAY THINK non-surgical cosmetic treatments such as Botox, peels and lasers are just for Hollywood stars, socialites and people worried about ageing. But there's more to these increasingly sophisticated technologies than turning back the clock on your looks. They're being used to treat a host of health issues, ranging from hair loss and acne to incontinence.

Indeed, many beauty treatments were originally developed for medical use. Botox was first approved for relieving spasms around the eyes more than 25 years ago. It works by temporarily paralysing the nerve signals that tell muscles to contract, and has now been officially approved for more than a dozen purely medical uses.

Even the so-called 'vampire facial', which re-injects a person's own blood into their face to rejuvenate skin, is based on a treatment that uses Platelet Rich Plasma (PRP), an enriched form of blood, to treat joint and muscle injuries.

Some treatments are available on the NHS, but most are carried out in private clinics. So how do you know which, if any, are worth the bother and expense? →



HAIR LOSS

Have you noticed your locks looking less lush? Half of women over 65 experience hair loss, usually caused by genetic or hormonal factors. It's also common in younger women with polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS).

Consultant dermatologist Dr Anjali Mahto, author of *The Skincare Bible* (Penguin Life, £14.99), stresses it's important to ask your GP for blood tests to help diagnose possible causes. 'There are many reasons for hair loss,' she says, 'including iron, vitamin B12, folic acid or vitamin D deficiencies, and autoimmune diseases.'

THE TREATMENT Platelet Rich Plasma (PRP). PRP contains tiny blood cells that repair and regenerate. Big fan Kim Kardashian says it helps plump up a lacklustre ponytail as well as her skin.

WHAT'S INVOLVED In the 90-minute treatment, blood is taken from your arm. Red blood cells are then removed, leaving clear serum and platelets to be injected back into the scalp.

THE EVIDENCE 'In studies, patients grew up to 30% more hair. In nine out of 10 people, excessive hair loss stopped,' says Dr Mahto.

THE COST Only available privately (£400 with Dr Sarah Shah; drsarahshah.co.uk). One to three sessions may be needed. Results last up to 18 months, but can be repeated.



Many of the treatments now used successfully for cosmetic concerns were originally developed for medical use

INCONTINENCE & 'SANDPAPER SEX'

According to Dr Mayoni Gooneratne of The Clinic by Dr Mayoni, '30% of women who have had at least one child have episodes of incontinence.' Collagen and elastin loss, particularly after the menopause, can lead to lack of support for the bladder, and cause vaginal skin to become drier, thinner and less elastic. This leads to loss of sexual sensation and discomfort - so-called 'sandpaper sex'. **THE TREATMENT** Radiofrequency (RF) vaginal rejuvenation. Used to tighten, strengthen and plump skin, it triggers the production of collagen.

Dr Mayoni has introduced the Geneveve system of RF treatment to her clinic. 'It may reduce incontinence by two to three episodes a day,' she says. 'It may not sound much, but the change in women's quality of life is massive. They are no longer afraid to leave the house.'

THE EVIDENCE RF treatments for vaginal rejuvenation are approved by the US government's medical safety department, the FDA. 'International, large-scale studies found that 90% of women had significant, sustained tightening for a year afterwards. The women reported an improvement in levels of sensation and in symptoms of stress incontinence,' says Dr Mayoni.



SWEATING

Life with hyperhidrosis - the medical term for extreme sweating - can be difficult. In most cases the cause is unknown, but this condition often develops during adolescence. It can affect feet, palms, underarms and the face.

THE TREATMENT Botox. This anti-wrinkle injection also blocks the secretion of the chemical responsible for switching on sweat glands. 'The results can be life-changing,' says Dr Sarah Shah.

THE EVIDENCE Botox has been shown to reduce perspiration by more than 50% in eight out of 10 patients. In half of patients, the effects last more than seven months.

WHAT'S INVOLVED About 12 to 25 jabs are given in affected areas, such as the armpits, hands, feet or face - and yes, treatment can be as uncomfortable as it sounds, but the results can last up to eight months.

THE COST Widely available privately - from £400 with Dr Lorraine Hill (hamptonclinic.co.uk). Your GP may refer you for treatment on the NHS.

stress incontinence,' says Dr Mayoni.

WHAT'S INVOLVED A slim probe delivers heat energy inside the body. 'No anaesthesia or downtime is required, so normal activity can be resumed straightaway,' says Dr Mayoni. **THE COST** Prices for Geneveve start at £1,500. One 30-minute treatment is typically required (geneveve.com). It's not available on the NHS.





SCARS

'Scarring is very common and can have significant physical and psychological consequences,' says Dr Anjali Mahto. **THE TREATMENT** Microneedling with PRP. Dr Stefanie Williams, who runs the Eudelo clinic in London, says, 'In medical microneedling, the skin is numbed and a device is used to make multiple small pin-point punctures in the skin to stimulate local collagen production. Adding PRP (see Hair loss, left) makes it more effective. It's a great treatment.'

THE EVIDENCE In a study published in *The Journal of Cosmetic Dermatology*, both sides of patients' faces were treated with microneedling. One side of their face was then injected with PRP and the other with distilled water. While the water-treated skin showed a 45% improvement (probably due to the microneedling stimulating healing), the skin treated with PRP showed a 62% improvement.

WHAT'S INVOLVED The Lumenis M22 is a 'fractional' laser that works a bit like microneedling but it's more powerful, creating tiny channels in the skin to increase production of healthy collagen and elastin. A cooling system makes it more comfortable than other fractional lasers. The treatment can last between 15 and 30 minutes depending on the areas treated.

Dr Mayoni combines microneedling with RF using a device called Intracel, which also boosts collagen. An anaesthetic is applied and a handpiece is moved over the skin, which causes a sensation of heat and prickling. 'The results are exceptional and can be tailored to treat deeper layers of the skin without damaging the surface. It can treat active acne and previous scarring at the same time.'

THE COST M22 treatment (lumenis.co.uk) costs from £150, available at PHI Clinic (phiclinic.com). Intracel costs £1,000 (drmayoni.co.uk). It's not available on the NHS.

Looking good

EXCESS HAIR

Hormonal disorders can cause hair to grow on the face, neck, chest, tummy, lower back and thighs. In younger women, the most common cause is polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS). If you have a lot of hair in areas that are more common for men, see your GP before trying any treatments. They may prescribe oral medication and creams.

THE TREATMENT Laser hair removal can treat the whole body and the face, destroying hair roots permanently. The light energy can feel very hot, so this has traditionally been uncomfortable. But the latest treatments are increasingly more comfortable. Look out for a new hair removal system, Fibra DFA, due to be released later this month which transmits light - not heat - so it's pain free.

THE EVIDENCE A study at Glasgow Royal Infirmary found that 93% of laser patients with PCOS were happy with the results.

WHAT'S INVOLVED A handpiece is moved over the area to be treated, and pulses of light energy target the hair root.

THE COST You'll need around five to six sessions at four-week intervals (see below) at around £790. You may need top-ups. Treatment may be available on the NHS.



•Laser hair removal was a success•



SARAH COLEY, 26, from Birmingham, had laser hair removal to treat hormone-related excess hair

I was diagnosed with PCOS when I was 18. I developed coarse dark facial hair on the sides of my face and chin. I tried waxing, shaving, plucking, hair removal cream and an epilator, but regrowth caused painful spots and patches of dark pigmentation. It made me very anxious and I resorted to wearing scarves and heavy make-up to hide my face. I read about laser hair removal on PCOS support sites and talked about it to my GP, who suggested I try it. After I'd had six 30-minute treatments, almost all the hair was gone - a far better result than I could ever have imagined. Now, if I do experience regrowth, it's fine and soft. Laser hair removal has changed my life for the better.

Sarah had Laser Hair Removal, which costs from £782 for six lower-face treatments, at sknclintx.co.uk

Looking good

ROSACEA

If you have redness on your nose and cheeks, you may have the common skin condition rosacea. It can also cause flushing (redness that comes and goes) or acne-like red spots, broken veins and skin that feels rough, dry and hot.

'Rosacea increases dramatically in women post-menopause,' says Dr Elisabeth Dancey of Bijoux MediSpa in London. 'Things that put our skin on red alert include alcohol, sun exposure, stress and poor skincare.'

THE TREATMENT Laser or Intensive Pulse Light (IPL). 'Rosacea breakouts that look like spots should be treated with prescription creams or tablets from a dermatologist or your GP,' says Dr Stefanie Williams. 'But once the spots have cleared, the only treatment that can improve facial redness and broken vessels long-term is laser or IPL.'

THE EVIDENCE In one study, after seven IPL treatments, 80% of patients had a reduction in redness, 78% reported reduced flushing and improved skin texture, and 72% noted fewer acne-like breakouts.

WHAT'S INVOLVED Millisecond-long pulses of light pass into the skin, targeted at areas of redness. It can be uncomfortable (like hot fat spattering on skin), but most devices now include instant cooling. IPL also triggers new collagen and improves skin texture.

THE COST You're unlikely to receive treatment on the NHS. Privately, from £250 (bijoux-medispa.co.uk).



Bear in mind that many 'minor' concerns may be medical conditions or symptoms of underlying health problems

MELASMA

Also called chloasma, this is patchy brown or greyish skin pigmentation. It can develop as a response to hormone changes, such as those occurring during pregnancy or while taking the Pill, and is made worse by exposure to sunlight. It appears mostly on the face and, while harmless, it can be distressing. 'Patients often place more importance on treating hyperpigmentation over lines and wrinkles,' says Dr Stefanie Williams.



THE TREATMENT Peels. A favourite with celebrities for that red-carpet glow, they're also a first-line treatment for melasma, as lasers can make the condition worse. 'My favourite treatment for melasma is the Eudelo MelaOut,' says Dr Williams. 'It's a highly effective, one-off peel with a tailored post-peel package that treats irregular pigmentation such as melasma like no other treatment I have seen in my career. It's safe for all skin types and, as an added benefit, will improve the appearance of dull skin, skin texture and enlarged pores.'

'I recommend Neostrate's Retinol Peel,' says Dr Mayoni. 'Not only does it fade pigmentation quite dramatically, but it gives amazingly smooth, radiant skin!' Lenka Anthony, senior aesthetician at Medicetics clinic in London, says, 'Obagi Blue Peel Radiance gives a freshness and a glow and is suitable for those with acne, acne scarring and melasma.'

WHAT'S INVOLVED Some peels are applied and then removed, and some are left on overnight. You may feel some heat or tingling on application. Some don't cause the skin to become noticeably red or flaky, but others involve a few days of visible peeling. Treatment takes around 20 minutes.

THE EVIDENCE A 2016 study found glycolic acid peels and tretinoin (retinol) peels were both effective at treating melasma.

THE COST Only available privately. A Retinol Peel costs £200 (drmayoni.co.uk). Obagi Blue Peel Radiance costs from £100 (find a clinic at obagimedical.co.uk/new/clinic-finder) and Eudelo MelaOut treatment and follow-up, £1,500 (eudelo.com).

DO YOUR HOMEWORK TO STAY SAFE

Dr Stefanie Williams explains that many of the skin concerns women think they just have to live with – such as adult acne and rosacea – are actually medical conditions that should ideally be diagnosed and treated by a dermatologist, either on the NHS via your GP or privately.

Other supposedly 'vanity' issues, such as hair loss, can indicate underlying health problems, so always see your GP before embarking on expensive treatments. For private laser treatments, ensure your clinic employs therapists who are properly

qualified and registered with the Healthcare Commission or British Medical Laser Association.

Your therapist should have level 4 training in IPL and laser from a regulated authority such as the Vocational Training Charitable Trust (VTCT) or Confederation of International Beauty Therapy and Cosmetology (CIBTAC). Also, make sure the clinic has a certificated LPA (laser protection adviser) attached to it to ensure they are working safely. The clinic should carry out a full consultation and patch test.

My acne has never come back



JANE MULKERRINS, 40, reveals how a light treatment cleared her acne.

I spent 15 years on medications for my acne, including creams, antibiotics, Dianette (a contraceptive pill), and the controversial Roaccutane. Everything worked, for a while, but then my acne would return. A friend suggested the new treatment: N-Lite, which uses yellow light to kill bacteria and calm inflammation while stimulating collagen. I had monthly treatments over six months and after two, my spots had reduced significantly. After six months, my skin was clear. That was 10 years ago and, though my skin has flared up occasionally, my acne has never returned.

Jane underwent N-Lite, which costs from £840 for five treatments, theprivateclinic.co.uk

ACNE

THE TREATMENT Light treatment.

As well as boosting collagen for younger-looking skin, light treatments are also the perfect complement to, though not a replacement for, prescription skincare and antibiotics for acne, says Dr Stefanie Williams. Red-light Dermalux treatments control inflammation, while blue light kills P. acnes, which are acne-causing bacteria.

The N-Lite or 'yellow-light' laser is another light treatment that neutralises P. acnes and aids in the toning down of redness (see Jane's story, above).

THE EVIDENCE A study by Dr Tony Chu at Hammersmith Hospital found a combination of red and blue light reduced acne by over 75% after 12 weeks.



MIGRAINE

According to the Migraine Research Foundation, women are three times more likely to get migraines than men - 17% of women and 6% of men suffer, according to The Mayo Clinic in the US. Women can be more prone to migraines at times of hormonal fluctuations, such as before their period or during the menopause. One in five chronic sufferers are unable to work because of the problem.

THE TREATMENT Botox. In 2010, both the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the UK regulator, the MHRA, approved Botox for chronic migraine. No one knows quite how Botox works on the condition, but it may reduce the release of neurotransmitters - chemicals in the brain that

WHAT'S INVOLVED Dermalux treatment feels like going under a mini sunbed for your face - except the light helps rather than harms your skin. You wear goggles, but the warmth is pleasant and most people find it relaxing and uplifting.

THE COST This is unlikely to be available on the NHS. Dermalux costs from £40 a treatment. Dr Mayoni recommends a course of 10, twice-weekly (find a clinic at dermaluxlect.com).



PHOTOS: ISTOCK/GETTY IMAGES

generate migraines.

THE EVIDENCE In 2014, *The Journal of Headache and Pain* reported that people treated with Botox had half the number of days with severe migraine, and four times as many completely headache-free days as people injected with a placebo.

WHAT'S INVOLVED Botox is injected into specific areas of the head and neck. The injections can be uncomfortable, but should not be very painful as the needle used is extremely fine.

THE COST Widely available privately, from £350 (woodfordmedical.com). Patients with chronic migraine (at least 15 days of headache a month, of which eight are a migraine) who don't respond to drug treatment are eligible for NHS treatment. Patients should speak to their GP for referral.