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THE NEW BOTOX FACIAL

Tempted by the promise of a younger-looking complexion, Emily Listfield steels herself for an innovative injection technique

I am no stranger to skin-smoothing injectables, but the thought of someone repeatedly stamping a device with 20 Botox-filled needles across my face has me terrified that I'll end up more mummified than beautified. Nervous but intrigued, I head to the Upper East Side office of plastic surgeon Norman Rowe, M.D., for the Botox Facial, a new skin-rejuvenating technique that claims to build collagen, plump wrinkles, and dramatically increase (a much needed) glow with no downtime.

Rather than injecting Botox deep into the facial muscles to smooth furrows, the traditional use of the muscle-paralyzing neurotoxin, Rowe combines smaller amounts with a personalized mix of vitamins and nutrients, then uses clusters of tiny needles (a technique known as micro-needling) to infuse the cocktail just beneath the surface layer of the skin. "Deeper injections of Botox and fillers address wrinkles and nasolabial folds, but they don't affect the appearance of the skin itself," he explains. "I thought, 'Wouldn't it be great to use a micro-needling technique to get the Botox and other nutrients exactly where they are needed?'"

Rowe had dreamed up the facial after noticing that patients who had regular Botox injections tended to have a reduction in oil production and smaller pores. He decided to take advantage of the fact that Botox affects the minute muscles closer to the skin surface. But why stop at Botox? For the facial, Rowe adds a customized recipe according to need; for anti-aging he will mix in hyaluronic acid to build collagen, along with vitamins A and C to strengthen the skin and make it radiant. For acne, he opts for green tea and salicylic acid, which act as antibacterial agents and exfoliate dead skin cells. The glow from the nutrients shows up within 12 to 24 hours, Rowe claims, while the full effect of new collagen growth—a result of both the needling process itself and hyaluronic acid—can take up to 10 days to appear. Results fade gradually over three to four months. (Prices range from \$750 to \$1,200, depending on the ingredients used.)

I watch anxiously as Rowe mixes my sui generis blend (I'm in the anti-aging rather than the acne life stage). While he attaches a small glass vial to a stamping device that contains 20 cannulated needles, I ask about

numbing cream. "The needles are so fine that you really don't need it," he says. He assures me again that my fear of ending up with a face frozen in place is unwarranted because the needles penetrate just 0.6 millimeters into the skin. (Regular Botox injections go into the muscle at about 10 times that depth.) "I would normally use 30 units of Botox just for the brow. For the facial, I use five units for the whole face," he adds.

The first stamp on my forehead feels like a rubber-band snap, but I quickly grow used to it as he continues to needle his way around the circumference of my face, my mouth, and under my eyes. The whole procedure takes less than an hour. I leave with a slightly pink face and the advice not to apply makeup for six hours lest it seep into my pores. Rowe had warned me that I might look slightly windburned the next day, which in my experience usually translates to looking like I face-planted into a bucket of red paint, but the following morning the only

evidence is a few faint blotches that soon fade.

Rowe realizes that this is an unorthodox use for Botox, and knows that not everyone is sold on the idea. "Micro-needling has been around for decades, but mixing it with other techniques is creating a whole new way of doing things," says Paul Jarrod Frank, M.D., a cosmetic dermatologist in New York. Nevertheless, he says, "While combining it with Botox makes sense, there have been zero trials and no FDA approval. It's an exciting future, but there is no proof."

For Carly S., 28, who had Rowe's Botox Facial two months ago, the proof is in her face. "At first I thought my skin just looked refreshed and hydrated, but after two weeks the lines around my eyes were less prominent and my

pores definitely got smaller. I always had a problem with shiny skin, and this completely fixed it," she says.

Personally, I found the effects to be subtle at the beginning—a bit more clarity, a slight tightening. But a week later, when I met a friend for dinner after a Pilates class sans makeup, the first thing she said was, "What have you done? Your skin looks amazing." While the Botox Facial will never take the place of lasers or the occasional injectable, I'm definitely looking tighter and brighter—and booking my next appointment. ■

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