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STYLE & FASHION

Woman's Worst Friend

Many of us worry about face wrinkles, but what about all the ripples from the neck down? One line of attack: newfangled dermatologic procedures

AGING CAN BE partly chalked up to a loss of collagen production, which starts slowing down at a rate of 1% a year around age 38, gradually encouraging our skin to sag, according to Dr. Alan Durkin of Ocean Drive Plastic Surgery in Vero Beach, Fla. But women are braced for the exodus of skin-plumping collagen from our faces well before that, thanks to the beauty industry. Those who wish to stem it can arm themselves with creams, serums, Botox, fillers and laser treatments. Yet the message that collagen will also be replenished less actively in our hands, arms, belly, knees and butt around the same time hasn't been so crystal clear.

I've been girding myself from the neck up since I was a teenager, but I was wholly unprepared to glance down during a jog at age 32 and witness the skin above my knees rippling like a pair of cheap nylon pantyhose. In the past seven years, this loss of elasticity hasn't seen fit to reverse itself. Some of these body lines are now so deep, I could plant seeds in

them and apply for federal crop subsidies. Even though I didn't anticipate this neck-down slump, the cosmetic medical industry has been on the case. "For several decades everyone focused on the face," said Dr. Paul Jarrod Frank, a cosmetic dermatologist with practices in New York City, the Hamptons and Miami. Now, noninvasive "lunchtime procedures" like those used to treat the face and neck have been developed for the body. For skin tightening using heat-based technologies, collagen production is stimulated through ultrasound and/or radio frequency, the latter of which is essentially waves of energy.

Ultherapy, promoted by 65-year-old model Christie Brinkley, transmits ultrasound energy to a deep tissue layer. Results can rival that of a surgical procedure, claimed Dr. Arash Akhavan, of the Dermatology and Laser Group in New York City. But the device is only FDA-approved for the brow, chin, neck and chest although many practices use it "off label" for other areas. More-



BODY OF EVIDENCE In 1987, a woman examines a Shar-Pei's skin folds at a Celebrate China festival in Colorado.

skeptical experts, like New York City plastic surgeon Dr. Lara Devgan—who is also the chief medical editor of an online cosmetic medicine database—say the price and pain threshold are too high to justify the unpredictable outcome. She wouldn't use it on herself and thus won't use it in her practice.

Physically cooler than Ultherapy is the new radio frequency treatment Emtone, a procedure Dr. Akhavan fa-

vors for toning skin on the midsection, buttocks and thighs. It uses heat and sound waves to initiate collagen production. "As far as before-and-afters and impressive results, it's the best I've seen," said Dr. Akhavan, who recommends starting with four sessions over two weeks and then scheduling a maintenance session every three months. Ballpark starting price: \$2,000 to \$3,000 for the butt and thighs.

Then there are injectable collagen biostimulators Radiesse (calcium hydroxylapatite) and Sculptra (poly-L-lactic acid). These long-acting fillers can be injected into the knees, thighs, buttocks, chest and inner arm. Dr. Devgan likens the immediate smoothing effect to "a fresh coat of paint" for crepey skin. Results last about a year and costs range from \$2,000 to \$10,000.

Those averse to trying ex-

pensive zapping and poking can try sleep, hydration, sunscreen and maintaining lean muscle mass, although those measures are more preventive than transformative. It's good to be wary of over-the-counter potions in a bottle. Edible collagen in particular is "absolute B.S.," according to Dr. Akhavan. Perhaps the only true solution is to embrace your inner Shar-Pei.

—Jessica Iredale