



Cosmetic surgeon Arthur Balin checks his work after giving Donna Cini five injections of Botox. Constant squinting had left "deep ski tracks" on her forehead above her nose, Cini said. She's had three sets of injections in "a little over a year."

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Jane Eisner *American Rhythms*

## Boomers may erase the lines, but they should not fear aging

**I**t took only about five minutes one morning last week to erase years from Donna Cini's face. Five minutes, five pricks of a needle, a vial of a diluted neurotoxin known as Botox, and anywhere from \$500 to \$800.

Botox, on the verge of approval by the Food and Drug Administration, may change the face of America. From now on, just as more of us than ever are entering the second half-century of our lives, we are assuming the face of the desperate seeker after youth, wrinkles fading into the past, time no longer given its honored place on one's brow.

The generation whose hair would be graying and faces would be creasing — were it not for outside intervention — now finds itself wealthy, vain and technologically advanced enough to go to great lengths to forestall what human beings have always known is inevitable.

This is, of course, a futile attempt to turn the gift of aging into an unwanted burden, and to control a process that is, ultimately, beyond our control.

But at least we're doing it in style. Instead of an embarrassing search for a mythical fountain of youth, middle-aged American women and even men are injecting, tucking, lifting, suctioning, augmenting and transplanting to make it appear that the years have stood still. (To the untrained eye, that is.)

The American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery reported last week that 8.5 million cosmetic procedures were done in 2001, a 48 percent increase in one year. Naturally, baby boomers were by far the biggest consumers.

And leading the way was the use of Botox, botulinum toxin, with 1.6 million injections last year, marking a 2,356 percent increase in five years. It is now the most popular cosmetic procedure in the nation, despite the ickiness of injecting the botulinum toxin directly into muscles in the forehead and around the eyes.

Who needs time in a bottle when a face-lift-in-a-bottle will do?

Botox is said to be so ubiquitous in Hollywood that directors complain it is difficult to find actors who can do a good frown. In some New York social circles, many women show up no longer looking angry or perturbed, their faces smooth and placid — for four or five months, anyway, until the next injection is needed.

This obsession is not only the province of bicoastal Beautiful People. Just about every plastic surgeon in the local phone book offers Botox injections. Some even have Botox Discount Days, when one patient after another will plunk down hundreds of dollars for the chance to look 25 again.

This was Donna Cini's third injection in "a little over a year." She's 53, a pleasant, handsome woman who lives in Boothwyn and happens to work for Arthur Balin, who has a dermatology and cosmetic surgery practice in Media.

Constant squinting had left "deep ski tracks" on her lower forehead above her nose, Cini said, making her look tense and tired. So, as classical music played in the background, Balin pricked the offending skin, wiped away a spot of blood, made one injection and then four more in other places. Cini didn't even wince.

For the next four hours, she was instructed not to lie down or lower her head, but rather to squint and frown as often as possible to disburse the toxin. While she's had no side effects, some patients have experienced swelling, numbing, droopy eyelids, slurred speech and eyes that don't shut.

Botox skeptics like Robert Butler, president of the International Longevity Center, worry about the long-term physical and psychological effects of this so-called miracle drug.

"To the degree that this becomes a cultural phenomenon, it reinforces a culture that is already Peter Pan-ish about aging," he says.

How true. Signs that we won't grow up are everywhere. As the newly lift-

ed TV newswoman Greta Van Susteren told *People* magazine, "One morning I passed by a mirror and didn't see a 16-year-old."

Why this should be a shock to a brainy, 47-year-old legal analyst is anyone's guess. But not only did this realization spur Van Susteren to get an eye-lift, but also she boasts that she has now "made it safe for other people to have plastic surgery."

I'm sure that many women, struggling with the aches and pains of aging without benefit of Van Susteren's \$900,000 salary, were waiting for her permission.

This self-centered openness characterizes much about the way boomers approach aging. What once may have been a private, individual attempt to hold on to youth is now expressed as a very public generational mission.

But something else characterizes this approach: Fear. Rebecca Utz, a sociologist at the University of Michigan, found this in her recent study of the way 50-year-old women, and their mothers, experience menopause.

The younger women spoke with less inhibition and greater awareness than their mothers, Utz says, but also with much greater fear of aging and death.

"It was the first time in their lifetimes that they couldn't control or stop something," she concludes. "As a generation, they'd never been told no. Now this was one thing they couldn't manipulate. They couldn't manage it as they've managed everything else in their lives."

Utz's insight into the internal manifestations of aging also applies to the external ones. "I enjoy my wrinkles and regard them as badges of distinction. I've worked hard for them," activist Maggie Kuhn once said. Now we want them erased, along with all other trappings of time, as if by stopping the outward symptoms we can stop the process altogether.

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