

The battle to put the clock back

BRITAIN'S first anti-ageing clinic is more like a luxury hotel. With white leather sofas and orchids, it's little wonder that Skin London is rumoured to have attracted celebrities such as Victoria Beckham, Meg Mathews and Sadie Frost. But ordinary women head here, too, knowing that procedures are carried out under heavy sedation (rather than general anaesthetic), which means they can go home straight away — whether it's after a shot of Botox, a skin peel, a vitamin shot, laser resurfacing, surgical face-lift or liposculpture. **BONNIE ESTRIDGE** reports.



by **Bonnie Estridge**

9.30am: SARA VAUGHAN, a 31-year-old marketing director from Chelsea, West London, has popped in for a Botox top-up (£180) before work. As Dr Michael Prager prepares to inject the muscle, paralyzing bacteria, Sara says:

'I'VE BEEN having Botox for three years now. I've had terrible frown lines since my teens

because I'm so short-sighted. Botox has taken away the frown lines and I also have injections around my eyes to prevent the crow's feet getting any worse.

'The treatment doesn't stop me smiling, but it means that when you are not, the muscles are relaxed and the lines are smoothed out, so they don't look obviously etched.

'Society is so focused on youth that it's easy to become paranoid about looking older than one should. I have my Botox shots every six months: each injection feels like a series of stings and then that's that — soon I'm looking nice and relaxed.'

10am: RACHEL SWATTON, a 28-year-old fashion buyer from Dulwich, South East London, is nervously anticipating a 160 vitamin shot. It is claimed these controversial vitamin C and B complex jabs — said to be favoured by Geri Halliwell — strengthen the immune system, give you boundless energy and make your skin glow. Injected straight into the bloodstream via the gluteus maximus muscle, in the bottom, they are not for the faint-hearted. Rachel says:

'I'M TERRIFIED, but I've heard the jab helps when you're under stress and I feel exhausted. I've been working 12-hour days and know that my looks are being affected.

Geri Halliwell looks so fantastic that I decided to try the treatment. If it makes a difference, then I'll be back for regular sessions.

(Theatre sister Shannon Lister injects a syringe full of thick orange liquid into Rachel's bottom.)

'UCH! I'm trying to be brave. I know the needle needs to go in deep and it's very long. But it's the feeling of the liquid going in that hurts — like a dull ache.'

'Now the syringe has been taken out it feels just like a vaccination jab — sore.'

'I'm worried about the after-effects — if I suddenly feel wonderful, am I just as suddenly going to come down with a big bang?'

'I only know about vitamin injections from reading about Geri, but so long as you don't get hooked on them, they can only do you good.'

11am: NANCY HAIGH, a 65-year-old housewife from Chichester, West Sussex, is married to Peter, 72, and they have three grown-up children. Nancy begs consultation with Dr Colagrande, as to whether she would benefit from a £2,750 eye-lift. Nancy says:

'I DON'T think that my skin is bad for my age — there aren't many wrinkles — but I'd still like to look younger if that's at all possible.'

'My daughter — who is 32 — recommended this clinic after she had some skin treatments here.'

Dr Colagrande examines Nancy's face. He agrees that her eyes could be made to look younger and recommends an upper and lower eyelid surgery plus some Botox to correct the wrinkles on the outer part of the eyes.

Seemingly unfazed by the price tag for the eye-lift, Nancy's reaction is very positive. 'Making my eyes look fresher and younger will give me the boost I need.'

12.30pm: EMILY, a 34-year-old housewife, is married to an investment consultant and they have two young children. She has moved to the St Albans, Hertfordshire, to have her lips plumped up, at a cost of £450. Emily says:

'I'VE always had rather thin lips but they've got even thinner with age. Also since having children, I feel as though I've lost some of my youth.'

'I've never had a cosmetic procedure done before but a friend had her lips plumped here and I thought she looked great, so decided to try it.'

'I asked my husband if he'd like to treat me for my birthday and he was all for it, so long as I didn't overdo it'

The day that Femal became a fly-on-the-wall in this country's first anti-ageing clinic...

I don't want a huge pout anyway, just the results. I think the lips. But I do feel apprehensive.

After a dental block, the anaesthetic used by dentists — the lips are ultra-sensitive — a filler called Dermalma is injected into Emily's lips.

Dr Michael Prager, who is doing the injection, says: 'This filler gives a great result and is based on a synthetic form of hyaluronic acid, a skin-plumper which occurs naturally in the body.'

'How long the lips stay plump depends on how one's body reabsorbs the filler. It could be anything from three months to a year.'

EMILY seems pleased with the results. 'I think the change is really subtle and, although no one else might notice, to me my lips look a lot fuller.'

1.30pm: ANNE JORDAN is a 42-year-old divorced solicitor from Wimbledon, West London. Concerned about sun damage to her complexion, she is having her face prepared for a £180 TCA (Trichloroacetic Acid) peel which Joann Robbins, senior skin specialist and co-owner of Skin London, is about to apply. Katy says:

'I'VE NEVER done anything to my skin before except apply the usual over-the-counter creams. Putting acid on my face seems such an alien thing to do, but I'm sure it won't be harmful long-term.'

'I don't think this is a question of vanity because I know that too much sunbathing has damaged my skin. Now is the time to address the problem, turn the clock back and be far more careful in the future.'

As Joann paints on the acid, Katy giggles nervously. 'It feels tingly and cold. It's not a burning sensation as I'd thought it would be —



Sara Vaughan (left) after Botox injections to smooth out frown lines and crow's feet. 'They feel like a series of stings'



Rachel Swatton (left) feels if you lead a stressful life, vitamin injections can do you only good — even if they are a bit painful



Nancy Haigh (right) with Dr Colagrande during a consultation in preparation for having an eye-lift, which costs £2,750



Katy Grant (inset) and (above) with senior skin specialist and owner of the clinic Joann Robbins. Katy is about to receive a light chemical peel which will take five days to reveal new, tighter skin underneath. She saw this as a way to compensate for too much sunbathing



Jill Wilkie is assessed by Dr Colagrande. She wants to get rid of old acne scars



Natalie Cheary (left) has her tummy marked for liposuction (right). She sees it as an easy alternative to rigorous diets and exercise — but it will cost £3,000

and looks a little red, but Anne is able to apply some make-up to cover it and smiles when she looks in the mirror.

'They've gone,' she says. 'I can't believe how quickly this takes effect. If I'd known how easy this would be, I would have come before.'

2.30pm: KATY GRANT is a 30-year-old PA from Fulham, West London. Concerned about sun damage to her complexion, she is having her face prepared for a £180 TCA (Trichloroacetic Acid) peel which Joann Robbins, senior skin specialist and co-owner of Skin London, is about to apply. Katy says:

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more as though someone is sticking pins in my face.'

JOANN explains: 'This peel works brilliantly for premature ageing caused by the sun. TCA is serious stuff and I adjust the strength depending on the individual.'

'A peel like this tightens the skin as the new skin underneath is tighter than the old layer. It can make a real difference to a woman of Katy's age, but even more so to an older woman. We have lots of clients in the 60 to 80 age group.'

'The TCA is colourless and absorbs right through the skin. Katy's face will go pink soon and the skin will then peel over five to seven days. She should have another two treatments to get the optimum effect.'

A few days later after the results started to show, Katy said: 'I am starting to see new skin underneath and although I don't think one should have another two treatments, I am rather pleased with how revitalised my skin looks.'

3.30pm: JILL WILKIE, 35, is a radiologist from Chesham, Buckinghamshire. She lives with her partner Dave, 32, who works in advertising, and they have a son, three, a daughter, two, and a three-week old baby boy. Jill wants advice on a facial deep chemical peel, which costs £200. She says:

'SINCE the baby was born, the post-acne scarring that I've had since my teens seems to have become far more noticeable than it has been over the past 10 years.'

'I've been told that this is because my skin has become drier with age and the scars are deep.'

Dr Colagrande discusses the treatment with Jill while they look at the image on the screen together.

'A series of deep chemical peels would take care of structural changes in the skin as this would penetrate down to its lower layers,' says Dr Colagrande. 'This would be a better solution than laser treatment, less drastic but a good result.'

However, the fact that Jill is breast-feeding is a problem. Dr Colagrande tells Jill: 'Before the peel, cosmetic products would need to be applied for six weeks to

pre-condition the skin, by softening it and evening out the tone.'

'These creams are strong and should not be used during breast-feeding, so I'm afraid you are going to have to wait.'

'I don't mind waiting,' says Jill. 'I am desperate to have better skin and so I'm pleased to hear that something can be done. As soon as the baby has been weaned, I'll be back.'

5pm: NATALIE CHEARY, a 25-year-old film and TV publicist, is married to Paul, 26, a sales executive, and lives in Wickford, Essex. She is interested in having liposuction on her stomach, thighs and bottom, which would cost around £3,000. She says:

'MONKEY is the key thing because I know liposuction will be expensive. On the other hand, gym membership and beauty products can cost well over £500 a year.'

'I'm very lazy. I hate going on diets and I can't be bothered to spend hours trying to exercise it away — I haven't got the time.'

DR COLAGRANDE takes digital pictures of Natalie's stomach and marks rings around the areas where most of the fat would be

removed. 'The areas marked with an X are where the real stubborn problems lie, and the outer lines show where I would "sculpt" the body by taking far less fat away and giving good contours, bringing the stomach and hips into proportion with the rest of Natalie's body.'

'This is a genetic deposition of fat — a typical pear shape: diet and exercise would never give Natalie anything like the result she wants. Liposculpture would give a really dramatic result. And it would be permanent because the fat pockets are removed.'

'But if Natalie puts on weight, then the surplus fat will simply be stored in areas that have not had liposculpture. Once you have had liposculpture, then you do have to watch your weight — it is not simply a quick-and-easy answer to dieting.'

Natalie says: 'I thought it would be expensive, and I was right. But I would be very happy indeed if someone could just suck out the fat for me and be done with it. I'm going to start saving as from now.'

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