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Non Invasive Facial Treatments

Noticeable Results

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As the unending quest continues for the fountain of youth, scientific breakthroughs are enticing more and more Americans to give age-defying procedures and treatments a try. And these days, many are opting for 'non-invasive' alternatives over surgery, especially on the face. But how effective are these treatments? We asked some specialists their thoughts on three popular, non-surgical options.

Dr. Tamara Ehlert on Thermage

Dr. Ehlert describes Thermage as a patented way of delivering uniform heat through radio waves to the deeper layer of the skin to allow collagen fibers to contract and plump up. "Collagen on the skin... as we age... are like rubber bands that have been stretched too many times. They become long, thin and flabby," she says, noting that the application of moderate heat to the skin tightens the fibers, making them thicker. While Ehlert cautions the results won't be as effective as a surgical face-lift, patients will see immediate improvement following a treatment. "It improves jowls and sagging under the chin. It also specifically treats the eyelid to give a smoother look to wrinkly, crepey eyelid skin," she explains. "Patients get an all-over firming and lift for a more youthful face, a cleaner jawline and smoother neckline."



Ehlert says the only downtime is the day of the procedure. "There is some pain medication prescribed, which makes it completely comfortable. After the procedure, the patient goes home and takes it easy." She says Thermage is appropriate for anyone with mild to moderate skin laxity who may not yet need a face-lift, someone who has had surgery and wishes to maintain the benefits, or those who have age-related changes who aren't interested in surgery but want a more refreshed, youthful appearance. "One of the advantages of Thermage is that you see gradual change...nothing abrupt...and you'll continue to see improvement for up to six months. Some people even hold onto those benefits for several years," she says. Ehlert says a treatment ranges anywhere from \$1,500 to \$6,000, depending on the doctor's expertise and the needs of the patient.

Dr. L. Mike Nayak on Wrinkle Fillers or 'Fake-lift'

Because many patients are in and out within minutes of their session, treating the face with injectable fillers is becoming known as the 'lunchtime' procedure. Nayak says fillers are a way to hide jowling, the sagging skin beneath the jawline. "When you see jowling, there's volume loss... things are shrinking in the face," he explains. "We can fill the little dent in front of the jowl and we also use fillers to build and square out the back part of the jawline." Fillers also treat deeper wrinkles like upper lip and smile lines, as well as fill in sunken cheeks. "They can add cheek volume, reinflating the cheek," he says. Nayak says some people see an improvement after one visit. "After a session, patients might decide that's all they need or they'll do more the next visit. That's the beauty of fillers, most of them are reversible," he says. "If, for some reason, you didn't like the end result, most fillers have an antidote."

While those factors are important for people who opt for fillers instead of surgery, Nayak points out that outcomes from surgery are longer-lasting and more cost-effective, noting that a treatment costs anywhere between \$1,000 and \$3,000, compared to \$5,000 to \$7,000 for a mini face-lift. "Fillers are not necessarily the most economical way of doing it, but they're ideal for people who don't want to undergo a surgical procedure with the least amount of downtime." Nayak cautions that non-surgical doesn't necessarily mean no downtime. "In general, any time you put a needle into the skin, you run the risk of a bruise. There's a 70 percent chance that patients get some bruising," he says. "Most people feel very comfortable within a day or two. It's safe to say if you get it done on a Friday, you can go back to work on Monday."

Pilar Williamsen, D.C., on Cosmetic Acupuncture

While cosmetic acupuncture or facial rejuvenation acupuncture has been practiced more steadily on the West and East coasts for 20 years, it has been established in St. Louis only in the past several years. Williamsen, one of only a few practitioners in the area who does this, says the process does more than improve the face. "It helps the whole body look and feel younger," she says. "It's all based upon the acupuncture circuit that travels through the face and head into other parts of the body. We use points to manipulate those circuits." For example, Williamsen uses a point in the leg to reduce puffiness in the face, or points in the face to help someone sleep better and have more energy. She says patients usually see improvements in the face such as tighter pores and increased collagen production and circulation. "There's a reason why those areas aren't functioning the way they should be. That means there are other imbalances in the body," she explains. "Balancing those things out, as well as working on the specifics of the face, not only superficially treats the face, but also makes the body feel better. When people feel better, they're taking better care of their bodies."

Williamsen says she sees a mix of patients, from people in their 20s to their 80s. "The more concerned one is with aging, the more likely they are to come in, and they're probably going to notice more significant results." She says bruising is likely for most patients. "The danger with needles is that people get bruised. For some, it doesn't always feel good. I use a lot of needles to restore collagen production. While you won't feel all of them, you're bound to feel one or two." She adds it usually takes 10 to 15 treatments to get significant results, but a majority of patients get noticeable effects with one treatment. At her clinic, each session lasts up to 1 1/2 hours and costs \$150. "Some patients see the effects from this treatment last for five to 10 years. However, most of them will choose to come in for maintenance treatments every three months to a year." Williamsen says acupuncture is a great alternative but not a replacement for surgery. "It's a very safe method of making you feel and look better, as well as improving your overall health. People come in with a desire to improve their face, and they walk out feeling better."

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