

The Gazette

FACIAL ACUPUNCTURE can give skin increased radiance and help ward off wrinkles. What's more, the painless treatment has been linked to benefits that are more than skin deep

More than one perk to pinpricks:

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Diane Holland has just been pinned. Supine on a treatment table, her face is adorned with 11 tiny needles strategically placed at varying angles near her eyes, mouth and jawline. There are nine more on her hands, tummy and lower legs.

The 46-year-old mother of eight has volunteered for this needling, her monthly facial acupuncture session. She lies in the serene feng shui-correct surroundings of the SinoCare clinic on Decarie Blvd. in NDG. "We all need help as we get older," said Holland, whose appearance, even without needles, truly does belie her age. "And I hardly feel them," she said.

The hair-fine needles barely pierce the surface layer of skin. She admits to being nervous at first. When inserted, there's an initial sensation of tingling and a slight warmth. After 20 minutes, she is feeling "really fabulous and utterly serene," she said. The stress of juggling a career as a personal trainer with caring for all those kids just melts away.

For beyond warding off wrinkles, facial acupuncture is said to have many positive side effects - benefits that are more than skin deep. "It's a healthy practice that's also a form of pampering," said the glowing, convinced Holland.

She's not alone. This new wrinkle on the Chinese practice of acupuncture is called facial rejuvenation, cosmetic acupuncture or even acupuncture face-lift, depending on who you ask. And it's a hot trend from Fifth Ave. to Rodeo Drive. Madonna, Cher and Gwyneth Paltrow are among the rich and vain who reportedly get needled regularly in the quest for eternal youth.



Holland received her first treatment in September, placing herself in the expert hands of Aina Zhang. As a teenager, Zhang put her dream of becoming an aesthetician aside to pursue serious studies in traditional medicine in China. Her specialty is gynecology, and she was licensed to practice in 1992.

Asian health systems are based on the belief that chi (pronounced "chee," sometimes spelled "qi"), or life energy, flows through the body along certain pathways, called meridians. When these meridians are blocked, it is held that physical problems develop. "It seems odd to many Westerners," Zhang said. "But in China it's been used for thousands of years."

A poor complexion can be a tip-off about imbalances in the system for Zhang. Under-eye circles or bags may indicate the kidney meridians are weak. Puffiness and water retention could mean the spleen isn't working right. Zhang's interest was pricked five years ago when she noticed how glowing and radiant the skin of women became while undergoing long-term acupuncture treatment. She then set out to develop her own facial acupuncture system.

Acupuncture has been found to improve muscle and skin tone, which leads to the face-lifting effect. Not to mention a boost in collagen production. "It also helps balance hormones, which can help with acne problems and also dry skin," Zhang said. Other cosmetic conditions it is said to alleviate include overall puffiness, under-eye bags, discolouration and a sunken, sallow look.

After a thorough medical history, every patient undergoes an examination to pinpoint the underlying problem or imbalance. The procedure takes between 10 and 30 hair-fine disposable needles per session, which are left in for roughly half an hour. Zhang's full Meridian Facial Rejuvenation package incorporates acupuncture with a custom-blended herbal facial mask, reflexology session and prescribed Chinese herbs.

Part of the beauty is that a session takes about as long as a manicure. Unlike Botox, which is also a temporary solution, you're not injecting yourself with toxins. There are no face-lift scars, nor any permanent frozen muscles or expressions of constant surprise.

"About six months ago, women over 40 began inquiring about facial acupuncture," said acupuncturist Xiaoyang Liu. "But I was skeptical." Pre- and post-menopausal women previously consulted her for relief of such related symptoms as fatigue, hot flashes or migraines. Now, armed with magazine articles about it, they wanted facial acupuncture.

Liu has practised for 14 years and runs the Able Chinese Acupuncture Clinic located in the N.D.G. Queen Elizabeth Health Complex. After extensive research on the technique, she tried it on an over-50 client. Facial wrinkling was greatly improved within two treatments, along with a decided lifting around the eyes, enough to give a more youthful, less tired appearance.

"I was very surprised at how effective it is," said Liu. "We can literally re-sculpt the face." Liu now sees eight facial acupuncture patients on a regular basis and is slowly beginning to incorporate facial acupuncture into her practice.

Many users report immediate effects of increased radiance, a real glow. But Liu says it can take up to seven treatments before you see any lasting effects. "Until that time, you get immediate cosmetic

effects, but they only last up to a week," she said. "However, the health benefits of balancing the system are more immediate and lasting."

Zhang charges \$65 to \$75 per treatment, depending on how involved the case is. She recommends a weekly treatment for four weeks, going to every two weeks or a subsequent four weeks. Liu gets \$40 for a session and recommends a series of 15 weekly treatments before lasting results can be seen. Both practitioners put their facial acupuncture clients on a monthly maintenance program after the initial treatment period. Botox injections can cost between \$150 and \$850, for localized effects that last up to four months.

Holland sees facial acupuncture as healthy vanity. "I love the fact that everyone underestimates my age," she said. "Yes, it's wonderful that I'm healthier, and that's really the most important thing. But having it reflected on the outside is important as well."

Illustration:

- Colour Photo: MARCOS TOWNSEND, GAZETTE / Diane Holland is a 46-year-old mother of eight who has been getting facial acupuncture treatments since September. "We all need help as we get older," she said.
- Colour Photo: MARCOS TOWNSEND, GAZETTE / Aina Zhang treats Diane Holland. Ten to 30 needles are used per session.

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