



IN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL, my teacher, Mr. Mercy, a chocolate-skinned man with cowboy boots, glasses and a closet full of polyester suits, was awfully concerned about me. He noticed that I stared out the window a lot with a sombre look on my face. He sent me to the guidance counsellor, who told me I was giving off an attitude, and if I wasn't careful I might have trouble making friends. He advised me to look in the mirror and observe the way my face might be read by other people. My eyes blinked. I don't remember if I cried.

As a whole I didn't feel sad or mad. What I saw in my reflection, though, were two downward-facing quarter-moon eyes that looked glum—all the time, I supposed, because that's just how they're shaped, like my mom's and her mother's before her. And a mouth that sat most comfortably when firmly closed. There wasn't a name for it then, but I now know I had resting bitch face.

But this story isn't really about RBF. It's about how—bummer alert—frowny mouths and droopy eyelids only frown and droop further as we age. And it's about finding my ultimate panacea: Bot♥x.

I was first offered the Bo back in the early aughts, when I was a rookie beauty editor in my mid-twenties. But a couple of things held me back. First, Botox had only recently been approved by the FDA for smoothing wrinkles (though it had been legal for 20-plus years for medical uses, such as treating cerebral palsy and migraines). I wanted to wait it out to ensure it wasn't going to result in three-headed babies down the road.

Second, I was wrongly under the impression that Botox was strictly for stunting deep valleys, which was never really my concern. Truth is, I'm only now realizing—because **NOBODY TALKS ABOUT THEIR BOTOX**—that this wonder drug can actually lift as much as it freezes. Turns out, I could have been looking a whole hell of a lot friendlier even before gravity set in.

I would never condone Botox for teens, yet the idea of "preventive Botox" has me wondering if maybe I shouldn't have waited until my late thirties to try it. See, there's been a bit of a shift on the topic in the past decade. When I started interviewing experts in the field, the thinking was, if you don't have wrinkles, you could be wasting your money treating them for years when they wouldn't have naturally appeared anyway. Now, most doc-

BOTOX FOR (TOTALLY CLUELESS) BEGINNERS

After a decade as a skeptic, beauty editor **CARLENE HIGGINS** finally tries injections. But is she too late to the party?

plumped up," she says. "Now it has swung in the other direction."

Zoe, a thirtysomething costume buyer in Toronto's film industry, started playing offence with Botox when she was 28. "I have a very expressive face, and all my stress goes right to my forehead," she tells me. "I didn't want to look plastic—or younger, even—I mostly did it for preventive measures." Despite the pinprick's initial fear factor, Zoe has come to find her regular Botox appointments to be less daunting than a bikini wax.

Indeed, in an age when Kim Kardashian shamelessly gets injected for all to see on her reality show, the procedure is now considered about as routine as touching up one's highlights. "Millennials have grown up with these treatments, whereas Gen Xers, baby boomers—they've had to adapt," notes Dr. Humphrey. Unsurprisingly, Botox among twenty-year-olds is growing, with over 100,000 having gone under the needle in America last year alone. (The Canadian Society of Plastic Surgeons doesn't tally such numbers, but most derms estimate the annual growth rate of six percent is roughly on par.)

This new generation of users is thinking about the *future* state of their faces, argues Dr. John Arlette of Total Skincare Centre in Calgary, whereas women in their 30s and 40s tend to be more >

tors are in the camp of Dr. Shannon Humphrey, director of continuing medical education in the department of dermatology and skin science at the University of British Columbia. She says, "Wrinkles that come from [repetitive] dynamic facial movements like frowning or smiling over time won't form in the first place if that action is softened with Botox."

She points to a 2014 study that followed identical twins, one having undergone regular preventive Botox in her forehead and frown lines for 19 years. At age 44, she exhibited no apparent wrinkles in those areas. Her sister, on the other hand, who had only received a handful of injections over the same period, showed significant creases.

In her practice, Dr. Humphrey has seen a growing trend toward preventive Botox in the past couple of years, and despite recent tabloidy headlines about women opting for obvious cosmetic surgery in pursuit of "rich face," she says requests for more realistic-looking results, particularly among the younger set, are on the rise. "A decade ago, patients wanted things *really* smooth and

ILLUSTRATION: MICHAEL LI PRETI (NEEDLE), PHOTOGRAPHY: IVAN RUBIN/TRUNK ARCHIVE (BARBEL)

reactive in their approach. For many of his younger clients, Botox is a natural progression of the acne or scar-removing treatments they underwent in their teens.

Top Toronto facialist Victoria Radford agrees: today, Botox is no big deal. She's just rolled back into Yorkville after touring as Fergie's personal face glower for the past four years, and I'm at her studio to test her new facial, called The Wand, centred around a device designed with microscopic silicone pyramids along the tip to help skincare ingredients penetrate more deeply. As she coaxes her signature candlelit lustre from my complexion, I confess I'm considering having something done. My second child has just turned one, and the lack of sleep is causing my already hooded eyelids to creep into my line of vision. "Something I really notice about my clients is anyone my age—so 35 and under—is not at all scared of Botox. But anyone older? You're all so frightened!"

Eyes blissfully closed, I reveal my trepidation: mostly, all the Botox-gone-bad on display in Hollywood and on the streets. Even the young ones look older and strange. But it turns out Radford has just been jabbed herself, and checking her out, she looks normal, pretty. "I'll send you to my guy," she tells me of the dermatologist she's been seeing on and off since she was 25. "I'll hold your hand. You will not look like a cat lady, promise." And I believe her.

Her guy is Dr. Nowell Solish, whose name I've heard before. A pal of mine, a lifestyle publicist who's now 33, started getting her elevens (the vertical lines between her eyes) frozen by him when she was 27. "Did you think twice before getting Botox?" I ask. "Not really," my friend tells me. "It's an investment. A good one." She, too, appears perky but not Plasticine. And so, with two solid referrals, I meet up with Radford to visit Dr. Solish, a kindly man with (thank heavens) smiley lines still evident around his wizened eyes.

"If you can see it, then by definition it wasn't done right," he says, addressing my concerns. "The percentage of people you notice is probably a very small proportion of people who are having it done." He swiftly sizes up my face: "This eyebrow is peaking a little higher than this one, and your middle brows are a little too low proportionately," he tells me. "I can soften that area and give it a little lift. Surgery would make it 95 percent better, but I can make it 60 to 70 percent better in literally two minutes." Umm, sold.

Suddenly, he drops an F-bomb. Before I would even get to that," Dr. Solish continues, "I would recommend filler." I freeze, as my initial fears come rushing back. Isn't filler what turns Kylie Jenner cuties into *Real Housewives* clones, with ballooned lips and jutting cheekbones? "Your eyes are a little deep-set and they're dark, so you get this valley here," he says, pointing to my under-eye area.

"When we fill it in, the light reflects back and it makes you look less tired." I think about it for a few seconds, realizing I've never noticed anyone's *under-eyes* looking fake before. "Go for it," says Radford. "You're here."

The Botox is a series of six to eight tiny pinpricks along the top of my brows. The Restylane filler, a hyaluronic acid replica of what we naturally have in our own cells, is two needles under each eye. They hurt, but not enough to prevent me from doing it again. I'll see their results instantaneously, though the Botox won't reveal its full lifting effect for two weeks.

Dr. Solish scrolls through the before and after pics he took of me in his chair. My under-eyes look like someone has taken a crap-load of brightening concealer to my dark circles. Any redness above my brows is minimal.

I go home with a spring in my Rebecca Minkoff flats and a secret in my heart that my husband does not detect—not even in the morning, when my under-eyes are temporarily swollen, just as Dr. Solish had warned might happen. They're so puffy I can see them in my periphery, but still, nobody notices at the office, even when I'm pointing right at the area. Within that two-week settling-in period, I get the odd, "You look great," but I'm never sure if they're referencing my outfit, my face or my pumped-up disposition, and that's just the way I like it.

When I face Dr. Solish for a re-see a fortnight later to ensure I'm happy with the final Botox results, he immediately spots what's been bugging me in the past day. When I'm looking straight ahead, my eyes are more open than they've been in years and more symmetrical than ever. But when I raise my brows, my left is too peaked, too exaggerated. "By relaxing some muscles, it can make others hyperactive," he explains. "We'll just put not even a unit in it to ease [the muscle] and make everything perfect." And after the requisite two weeks, it is.

In four to six months, the \$400 Botox will supposedly wane; the \$600 filler will last about three months more. (Dr. Solish reveals clinical trials are underway for a Botox that will last a couple of months longer, which he foresees launching in about a year.) It's bloody expensive, but the results are well beyond any miracle cream I've tried, and more confidence boosting than my best haircut. Would I have done this earlier? Eyebrows point to yes. ●



5 Things to Know Before you Bo

- 1. Vet your provider.** Seek out a qualified cosmetic dermatologist (the cost is often only moderately more than a non-medical practitioner) through word of mouth, says Calgary-based Dr. John Arlette. No luck? Read reviews on ratemds.com.
- 2. Book a consult.** To ensure the derm is right for you, request to see before and afters and check out the doctor's face. Trout pout? Buh-bye. "It's reassuring for a patient if their physician looks natural," says Vancouver MD Shannon Humphrey.
- 3. Forget Groupon.** Don't risk shoddy results to save money. Instead, try "Baby Botox," meaning more frequent injections (every two to three months instead of six) with less injected, says Dr. Arlette. It's more affordable, plus the effect is subtler, yet preventive.
- 4. Budget wisely.** Botox can be billed by unit or by area, but the total is usually about the same. In Toronto, costs vary from \$10 to \$14 per unit, says Dr. Nowell Solish. By area, prices range from \$300 (for say, frown lines) to \$800 for multi-zones.
- 5. Do the follow-up.** After the settling-in period, revisit your pro to ensure you are both completely satisfied. Small tweaks are usually easy to make, and are often free. "It's important to fine-tune, especially after that first time," says Dr. Humphrey.

PHOTOGRAPHY: COURTESY OF DR. NOWELL SOLISH (BEFORE AND AFTER).