

Outpatient is in

Inject it, peel it, buff it: Minimally invasive procedures accounting for a bigger portion of cosmetic treatments

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Editor's note: This is the second in a four-part series about plastic surgery. Watch for the next installment about reconstructive surgery next Tuesday.

Maybe more people want quick fixes for aging skin. Maybe more people want those people's business.

Whatever the case, cosmetic procedures are big business.

Americans spent more than \$11 billion on cosmetic surgeries and treatments last year, including more than \$5 billion on nonsurgical or minimally invasive procedures, according to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons. In fact, while the numbers of cosmetic surgeries have fallen by 3 percent since 2000, the numbers of minimally invasive procedures, such as laser skin treatments and injections, have grown 66 percent.

The ASPS reported that Botox injections alone accounted for 4.1 million nonsurgical procedures in 2006 - counted by each body part that gets injected - followed by chemical peels, laser hair removal, microdermabrasion and hyaluronic acid.

Increasingly, medical spas and primary-care doctor's offices in Naperville and nationwide are offering cosmetic procedures that used to be performed exclusively by plastic surgeons. But their popularity has prompted concern about safety.

The American Academy of Dermatology urges patients to select a board-certified physician or surgeon for any cosmetic procedure. The academy says patients also should ask questions about the staff's training and experience, and ask to see before-and-after photos of previous patients.

Here's what Dr. Benjamin Raab, a dermatologist and director of the Center for Cosmetic Skin Surgery in Naperville, tells his patients to expect - including the costs, risks and recovery time involved in the country's five most common minimally invasive treatments.

Botox

What: An injection of liquid containing botulism toxin that paralyzes the frowning muscles that cause wrinkles in the forehead. It also can be injected into sweat glands in the armpits to control perspiration.

Where: Performed in a clinic or spa by a physician - ideally one who is trained in anatomy and physiology and the structure of skin, such as a dermatologist, Raab said.

Risks: Asymmetry, droopy eyebrows. Rare side effects include bruising and allergic reactions.

Downtime: None.

Discomfort level: Like a pin prick during treatment, but no discomfort afterward.

Cost: Insurance might cover Botox injections for sweating. Otherwise, the average physician's fee is \$492, according to the ASPS.

Chemical peel

What: A mild acid rubbed on the skin to exfoliate dead skin cells and smooth the skin's texture and improve red and brown spots. Medium and deep peels encourage new skin cell growth and collagen production.

Where: Performed in a clinic or spa by a physician - ideal for a deep peel - or by a nurse, physician assistant or esthetician.

Risks: Scarring, redness, permanent skin color change.

Downtime: None for superficial peels. Medium peels take two to three days for scabbing and flaking skin. Deep peels take up to two weeks to heal - blisters may form, break, scab and fall off, and surgical tape may be necessary to cover the affected skin, according to the American Academy of Dermatology.

Discomfort level: Sensations range from tingling to rug burn during superficial and medium peels. Deep peels require sedation.

Cost: Average physician's fee is \$686, according to the ASPS.

Laser hair removal

What: A concentrated wave of light that kills the root of the hair to prevent it from growing back.

Where: Performed in a clinic or spa by a physician.

Risks: Blisters, permanent skin color change. In rare cases, burning, scarring, infection.

Downtime: 24 to 48 hours for redness.

Discomfort level: Like a rubber band snapping the skin during treatment, with a possible sunburned feeling afterward.

Cost: Insurance might cover treatment for chronic ingrown hairs or women's facial hair caused by hormonal problems. Otherwise, the average physician's fee is \$466, according to the ASPS.

Microdermabrasion

What: The buffing and vacuuming of dead cells from the upper layer of skin to smooth the skin's texture.

Where: Performed in a clinic or spa by a physician, nurse, physician assistant or esthetician.

Risks: Temporary mild redness.

Downtime: None.

Discomfort level: Like sand hitting you in the face.

Cost: Average physician's fee is \$264, according to the ASPS.

Hyaluronic acid

What: An injection of a soft-tissue filler for deep skin grooves, such as smile lines between the nose and mouth.

Where: Performed in a clinic or spa by a physician.

Risks: All fillers involve some risks, including swelling and bruising. In rare cases, allergic reactions can occur; some fillers require a skin test prior to the procedure.

Downtime: None.

Discomfort level: A topical anesthetic can numb the skin before the procedure. Treatment can feel like a shot from a big needle.

Cost: Average physician's fee is \$585, according to the ASPS.

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