



An ounce of prevention

ANTI-AGING PROCEDURES INCREASING AMONG YOUNGER WOMEN

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At only 35, Joan Cianciola, of Branford, realizes that she might be too young to be worried about wrinkles.

But when she noticed that a line in her forehead was getting deeper and deeper, she became concerned, and she did something that's usually associated with older women — she visited a plastic surgeon for botox injections.

Botox is a substance that is often used to prevent or treat wrinkles in the forehead area, and last week, Cianciola was in the offices of Westport plastic surgeon Joseph O'Connell getting herself a fix.

Cianciola, who owns the North Haven clothing store Camouflage, admitted that her actions might seem odd to the casual observer. However, she doesn't think that what she did was all that unusual and said she knows of women even younger who have such treatments.

"It's almost the trend to get it done," Cianciola said.

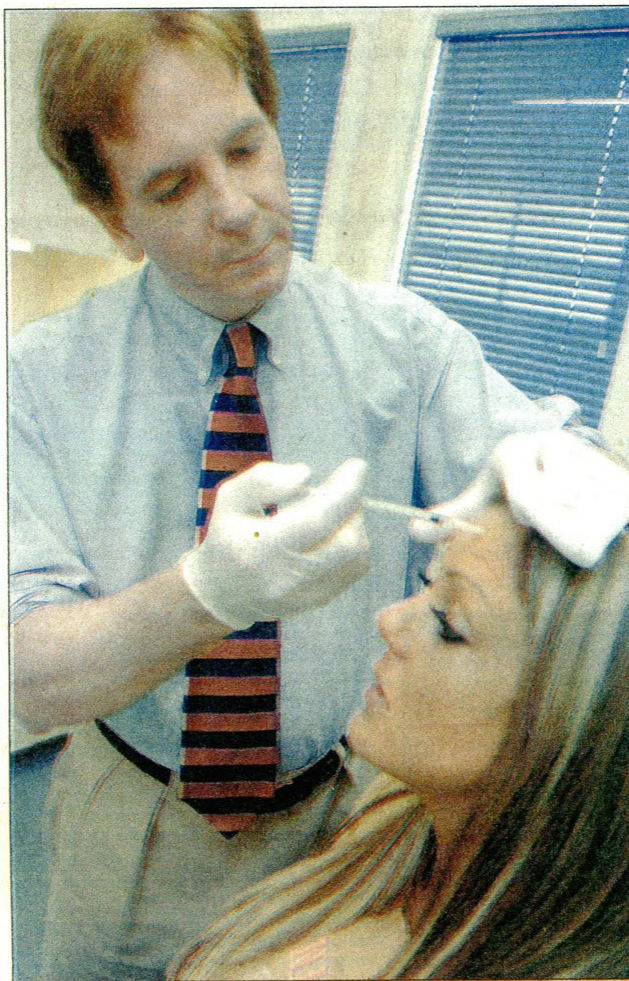
Several local plastic surgeons agreed that more and more women in their late 20s and mid-30s are having nonsurgical procedures typically associated with older women.

These include not just botox, but also Restalyne, an injectable filler that treats minor wrinkles; chemical peels, which use a chemical solution to remove damaged outer layers of skin; microdermabrasion, in which a machine is used to slough off dead skin, and others.

According to the California-based American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery, about 16 percent of botox injections performed in 2006 were done on those aged 19 to 34. That age group also represented 14.5 percent of those who had chemical peels, 25.2 percent of those who had microdermabrasion and 16.4 percent of those injected with hyaluronic acid (found in Restalyne and other fillers).

As cosmetic procedures in general become more publicized, it's only natural that a more diverse group of people will be interested in them, O'Connell said. "It's all due to an increase in public awareness," he said.

He added that many of these procedures can be beneficial to younger women. For instance, he said,



Above and top, Dr. Joseph O'Connell injects botox into the forehead of Joan Cianciola of Branford at his Westport office.

their late 20s, for botox injections.

The interest of younger women in the product isn't as odd as it seems, he said, as using it at a relatively early age can stop wrinkles from forming, helping a young woman to keep her skin looking youthful for a longer time.

"It's mainly preventative," he said.

Dr. Alfred Sofer, a plastic surgeon in private practice in Fairfield, echoed O'Connell's statement. Sofer explained that botox restricts the muscle movements that lead to wrinkles. Less movement means fewer wrinkles, resulting in a younger

"It's not a bad thing to do," he said. "It actually does slow down the process of aging."

As for some of the other procedures, O'Connell said that Restalyne and other fillers typically aren't used to prevent the effects of aging, but to soften already-existing wrinkles. It's rare that a woman in her late 20s or early 30s will need fillers for the purpose, O'Connell said, and most people in that age group who get Restalyne injections get them to plump up thin lips.

However, O'Connell said some women under 30 do have deep nasolabial folds — the lines that run from the side of the nose to the corner of the mouth — and have Restalyne injections to fill them in.

Other procedures, like microdermabrasion, are classified by the doctors as fairly common and benign. Sofer said microdermabrasion does little more than clean up the skin, giving you a healthier glow. "It's good for maintenance," he said.

O'Connell agreed, and said it really falls more into the category of a spa treatment than a plastic surgery procedure. Like any other procedure he does, O'Connell said, his goal in performing botox injections and the like in younger women is to make them feel better about themselves.

But not all are comfortable with the idea of women 35 and younger heading to the plastic surgeon's office to reverse or prevent the effects of aging. Michelle Lucas, a licensed clinical social worker in private practice in Ridgefield and Norwalk, said the trend is distressing, and is yet another example of a culture that emphasizes appearance over all else.

"It's an extension of a way of thinking about ourselves, and of looking at physical qualities as the most important aspect of our lives," Lucas said. "If we're not wrinkle-free, we're not worthy of anything."

But all the doctors interviewed said they wouldn't push a patient into doing something he or she was against, and at least one doctor said he'll dissuade patients from a treatment if he thinks they don't need it.

Dr. Jeffrey Rosenthal, Bridgeport Hospital's chief of plastic surgery, said when a patient comes to him looking to correct minor flaws that don't really need treatment, he'll try to talk her out of it.

"If a woman is in her 20s and has one little line or nothing too serious, I'll tell them [they don't need anything]," he said. "I'll often turn to a woman and say 'You know what? You look great. There's nothing I can do.'"

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