



CANVAS ENHANCEMENT



Smooth Talk

The pandemic has had a side effect no one foresaw: a boom in the demand for wrinkle-releasing injections.

By SABRINA MADDEAUX

F lash back to spring 2020. We had just entered lockdown, and socializing via video chat was a novel and exciting way to stay in touch and escape the tedium of pandemic life. But then Zoom fatigue took hold. And despite using tricks like beauty filters and ring lights, many found it almost impossible not to be distracted by perceived facial flaws.

The internet responded with tips on how to fake eye contact, essays lamenting Zoom's ruinous effects on self-esteem and YouTube tutorials on how to improve makeup for virtual meetings. But what is perhaps the most interesting was the rapid surge in patients seeking wrinkle-smoothing injectables (like Botox), which doctors dubbed the "Zoom Boom."

Throughout the month of June, Dr. Michael Salzhauser, a Florida plastic surgeon who is also known as "Dr.

Miami," offered drive-thru injections from the safety of his Bal Harbour garage. In Vancouver, Dr. Thomas Buonassisi says that his 8 West Cosmetic Surgery & Laser Skin Clinic saw more than 700 new patients sign up over a six-week period. "We all thought there would be a big, big slowdown—that people would be scared," says Dr. Cory Torgerson, of the Toronto-based cosmetic treatment clinic Sovereign Skin. "It was the opposite: We'd never been busier."

For those not well acquainted with cosmetic enhancements, Botox is an injectable drug made from botulinum toxin that temporarily relaxes and paralyzes muscles, resulting in the diminished appearance of fine lines and wrinkles. Other botulinum toxin brands include Jeuveau, Xeomin and Dysport; these are not to be confused with dermal fillers, which are injectable gel-like substances that restore lost volume in areas like the cheeks and the lips.

PHOTOGRAPH BY FELICITY FORD/ANTONY M. RACINE

Botox and Beyond

BOTOX Created by Allergan, Botox was approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in 2002 to temporarily treat crow's feet, forehead lines and glabellar lines (the frown lines between your brows that are commonly called "elevens"). Results typically take between one week and one month to appear and can last upwards of six months.

DYSPORT Produced by Ipsen, Dysport was approved by the FDA in 2009 specifically to diminish glabellar lines and is primarily meant for moderate to severe cases. Because of the way Dysport diffuses, it's more effective at treating larger areas and less effective at pinpointing precise concerns. Results occur within a couple of days and last between three and four months.

XEOMIN Produced by Merz Pharma, Xeomin was approved by the FDA in 2010 to treat brow lines. Non-interchangeable with other injectables, it's one of the few treatments that contain no additives, which reduces the risk of the body creating antibodies to counteract its effects. Results appear within one week and last for three to six months.

JEUVEAU With a similar, yet more affordable, formula to Botox, Jeuveau was approved by the FDA in 2019 but only for reducing glabellar lines due to its short time on the market. That said, doctors use it off-label to treat other areas like the forehead, eyes, chin and neck. Full results appear within a week and last between three and six months.

ENHANCEMENT CANVAS

MANY FOUND IT ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE NOT TO BE DISTRACTED BY PERCEIVED FACIAL FLAWS.

While there's no public data on exactly how many botulinum toxin injections doctors have performed during the pandemic, there's plenty of anecdotal evidence to show that demand is unprecedented. For one, airlines are using unfilled passenger seats to transport shipments to the United States to make up for lost revenue. Roger Samways, American Airlines Cargo's vice-president of commercial, told *CNBC News* that this is the first time the airline has "seen quantities of this nature."

According to Torgerson, it's not just the frequency of video chats that's to blame; it's their generally poor quality. "Where do you see the most wrinkles, asymmetries and discontinuities in your face? In places where there are more shadows," he says. "If there's fabulous light, you don't notice them as much. Most people on Zoom calls are in a dark room." Suddenly, those fine lines look more like gaping crevices.

In times of economic uncertainty, including the Depression, economists have traditionally tracked lipstick sales to gauge consumer spending. The idea is that people see lipstick as an affordable luxury and continue to buy it during downturns—except now we're all wearing masks and a bold lip seems like an artifact of a bygone era. These days, it's all about the eyes and forehead. "When you wear a mask, you really see your lower eyelids, and you see your eyebrow position much more," says Buonassisi. "People end up focusing on those features."

The mask effect helped seal the deal for 36-year-old Miranda,* a Toronto-based graphic designer. After contemplating getting Botox for years, she finally decided to move forward during the pandemic. "Even when I did my makeup and felt great, as soon as I put on my mask, all I saw were tired eyes, crow's feet and forehead wrinkles," she says.

While newer formulas at lower price points have made botulinum toxin injections more accessible, treatments remain a luxury for many. Its surge may reflect the economic gap amplified by the pandemic, meaning that those with money now have more of it to spend on cosmetic enhancements. "I never really thought that I was in competition with the travel industry or fashion industry, but maybe I am," says Torgerson. "People's excess cash isn't going to trips or some fabulous piece of fashion, so now they have the money and time to do procedures they've always thought about."

TikTok also influenced Miranda's decision. "During lockdown, I spent a lot of time on the app, where there are endless plastic surgeons with explanations and videos that helped calm the fears I had about Botox," she reveals. She's far from being the only one. Once the domain of Gen Z, TikTok attracted bored millennials during Q1 of 2020, generating the most quarterly downloads ever for an app. The service's young stars and heavy-handed filters have created a new beauty standard that tends to make anyone over the legal drinking age feel ancient. At the same time, medical professionals, including dermatologists and plastic surgeons, have embraced the app as a means to both educate viewers and market themselves. The hashtag #Botox has over 519.9 million views alone.

At the end of the day, during a global pandemic, people just want to feel good—even if it's only about how their forehead looks on camera. Says Buonassisi: "This has been a very difficult year for a lot of people, and sometimes little treats like Botox can go a long way toward making someone feel a bit better." ■

(*Name has been changed.)