

Natural lift

Can alternative therapies smooth out your wrinkles while soothing body and soul? **Lisa Ritchie, 41**, tried three holistic 'face-lifting' treatments.

Botox, lasers, fillers... non-surgical anti-ageing treatments are becoming ever more sophisticated. Case in point is the Isolagen Cell Storage System, which allows you to freeze your own youthful, collagen-producing cells to be injected years later (rather like freezing your eggs). But for those who shy away from such high-tech procedures, there are other alternatives to going under the knife. Alternative being the operative word, as the following natural 'face-lifts' employ complementary therapies rather than gadgets and chemicals, and aim to rejuvenate your face through rebalancing your whole body.

Cosmetic acupuncture

The idea of fighting wrinkles by having needles stuck in your face has become positively commonplace. But I'm not talking about a syringe full of Botox. The traditional Chinese medicine clinic at AcuMedic Centre has been practising facial acupuncture since the 1980s, but has only recently started marketing it as a beauty treatment.

'Cosmetic acupuncture' works on several levels. Some needles are positioned to achieve a specific local result: if you suffer from 'marionette lines' around the mouth, for example, needles will be inserted at an upwards angle here to lift the muscle; while, to de-puff under-eye bags, they will point downwards to drain fluid. In addition, as with any acupuncture, needles are placed at meridian points to stimulate the flow of chi, improve blood circulation and enhance the overall function of your body, thus improving your skin in the process.

In a small clinical room, Dr Lao determines the general state of my health through taking my pulse and examining my tongue. Unsurprisingly for a Londoner, I appear to be suffering from stress, which has overtaxed my liver and weakened my spleen. She correctly diagnoses a tendency towards indigestion. Now it's needle time. I have visions of being turned into a human pincushion, but in fact only a few ultra-fine, 15mm disposable needles are strategically positioned on my forehead, a particularly prominent crevice between my brows and near my crow's feet, plus one in each hand and foot. I get an almost electrical jolt from the one in my left hand – an indicator, says Dr Lao, that it's working. I'm left to relax to soothing music for 20 minutes, then treated to a vigorous acupressure face and head massage.

Afterwards, I feel a bit light-headed and my complexion looks remarkably refreshed, considering no cosmetic preparations – bar a simple herbal cream in the massage – has been used. Is it my imagination, or has my worst furrow softened? It's hard to tell, but I certainly have a soft-focus glow. And later that day, I realise that despite a nonstop stress bonanza, I haven't suffered from my usual indigestion.

One thing is certain, I am sufficiently convinced by the effectiveness of the treatment to try a few more sessions – five to ten are recommended for the best results, followed by maintenance sessions every few months. *Cosmetic Acupuncture costs £40 per session at AcuMedic Centre (see p77 and p101).*

LIA Therapy

An eyebrow tidy and an aura reading may sound an unlikely combination, but LIA Therapy marries traditional beauty maintenance with alternative therapy to create an altogether more spiritual experience. Billed as a 'holistic natural facelift', it was developed over nearly 20 years by beauty therapist-cum-white witch Deborah Mitchell, out of a desire to heal clients 'inside and out'. The acronym LIA derives from the treatment's holy trinity of lymphatic drainage, 'incandescent massage' – an energy-channelling technique created by Mitchell – and acupressure. The idea is that the robust physical massage manipulates the facial muscles, the energy stimulates a lifting effect akin to that produced by high-tech electrotherapy machines, while the healing sends you into a deep state of rejuvenating relaxation. Mitchell's organic Heaven products are used in the facial.

In a room that looks like a posh doctor's surgery, I lie on the couch covered with a sheet while Mitchell reads my aura. She also sees a little girl in my future – who I may or may not give birth to (Mitchell stresses she will only reveal such psychic insights to those who are open to them). Over the course of an hour, my face, décolletage and head are massaged with a combination of movements. One feels like a firm, fast butterfly wing beating against my face (toning); other slow, strong, continuous strokes feel as if they are literally remoulding my facial contours. Mitchell claims that over time, these movements, which smooth the muscle and break down fatty fluid deposits, can reshape

the face – defining cheekbones for example. It is certainly relaxing; despite a pre-treatment double espresso and roadworks outside, I zone out completely. Afterwards, Mitchell asks me to look in the mirror. It's hard to separate genuine results from the inevitable element of placebo, but my face does seem less puffy, more defined (the pre-treatment eyebrow-shape no doubt contributes to the illusion). One thing is clear: it's suffused with a youthful glow. 'I've worked on your endorphin-releasing glands,' Mitchell tells me. 'The effect on your skin is like you've just had an orgasm.' Well, that's certainly a facial with a difference. *LIA Therapy with Deborah Mitchell costs £145 at the Hale Clinic (see p79).*

Jurlique Deluxe Rejuvenessence Facial

Rejuvenessence was developed by holistic massage therapist and former nurse Margareta Loughran in the 1980s and is on the menu of several London clinics, but it has only recently been combined with organic Jurlique products in a luxurious, 90-minute treatment.

The theory is that over time, an accumulation of negative emotions and stress sets our facial muscles, while the gelatinous layers in between stiffen and reduce the skin's flexibility, so lines and wrinkles become fixed. Rejuvenessence involves gentle massage, not only of the facial muscles, but the connective tissue. Loughran claims the 'press and release' technique dispels trapped emotions and tensions, restoring the skin's elasticity, while working on the acupuncture points of the face enhances the flow of energy in the body, allowing the internal organs to function more efficiently. After a particularly heavy work week, I'm the perfect test case.

Arriving at the spa stressed and exhausted, I'm cleansed and cosseted with gorgeous-smelling Jurlique anti-ageing products before therapist Rene Van Eysen gets down to the real business at hand. The massage is very slow, soft yet precise, using just the tips of the fingers. Some movements feel like a snail making hesitant progress over your face (this is working the connective tissue); others feel like a gentle pinching (which lifts the muscle). The therapist works on half the face first, so you can see the effects. Lulled by the gentle repetition, I'm almost asleep when Van Eysen rouses me to look in the mirror. The difference is subtle but remarkable: the crease from nose to mouth is noticeably smoothed and my forehead looks less lined. Results noted, Van Eysen resumes work on the other side.

Afterwards, apart from the improvement to my skin, I feel incredibly revitalised. The next day, a friend who has dabbled with Botox is so impressed by the effects, he decides to book himself in for a treatment. Best of all, at time of writing a week later, my face still looks smoother than usual.

The Deluxe Rejuvenessence Facial at the Jurlique Day Spa & Sanctuary (see p89) costs £99.50, or £497.50 for the recommended course of six.

