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Is It Time for More Than Botox?

Monica Corcoran Harel | November 19, 2025



You never forget your first prick. It was the early aughts and Los Angeles beauty writers like me were lining up to try a revolutionary new neurotoxin known as “Botox.” Within a week, the etched frown lines between my thirtysomething brow dissolved like butter on toast. I looked in the mirror and saw a softer version of myself. I was hooked.

Cut to two decades later. My love for neurotoxins like Botox, Xeomin, and Daxxify hasn’t waned, but my middle-aged face is now a much heavier lift. For starters, there’s less collagen because we start to lose about 1 percent of this protein every year in our mid-20s. That rate accelerates as we get older, and by our mid to late 40s, especially around perimenopause, the inevitable decline in estrogen further speeds our collagen depletion. Facial fat, too, drops with every birthday so our cheeks can seemingly deflate like day-old balloons.

“Over time, the skin gets thinner and weaker, which makes it harder for the face to hold fillers. You’re also more prone to wrinkles,” says Beverly Hills board-certified dermatologist Jessica Wu, MD, who likens younger skin to soft, pliable velvet. At my age, the skin is more like pesky linen that creases easily. Also, I have more tell-tale signs of being a woman in her 50s, like a neck that wobbles, hooded eyes, and a lax jawline. Have I aged out of injectables? Is it time to make the leap from injectables to more invasive measures? Wu says: “Every day, one of my patients asks me, ‘When is it time for surgery?’ I tell them that I can do regenerative treatments like lasers to thicken the skin, but I can’t lift jowls or a neck.”

In other words, I'm now Chicken Little. But it's my face, not the sky, that's falling and can't get up—without more invasive measures. Clearly, I'm not alone. In my demo, people between the ages of 55 to 69, facelifts, neck lifts, and brow lifts make up a whopping 60 percent of cosmetic surgical procedures. Less than a quarter of this demo opt for neuromodulator injections, according to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons. And for all the outrage over Gen Z and millennials going under the knife too soon, the above-mentioned surgical fixes only comprise 20 percent of procedures for people in the age range of 40 to 54.

Instead, many of these younger women overdose on fillers like Juvederm, Radiesse, and Restalyne. "There's a flawed concept that overfilling will puff up the skin and lift it. It actually ages the tissue," says Chicago-based and Harvard-trained plastic surgeon Julius Few, MD, who consults with patients who were aggressively inflated by overzealous dermatologists or injectors at unlicensed med spas. (Typically, a family member or friend stages a filler intervention, he adds.) "Out of every ten patients who come to see me to have their filler dissolved, half of them, the ones in their 50s, need surgery."

Thankfully, I have never been a fan of fillers—save for an occasional squirt or two in my thin Irish lips. And for the record, prescription retinoids are my skincare ride or die. Still, there's no denying the fact that all the peptides, growth factors, exosomes, and glycolic acid in the world can't turn back time to the days when I could metaphorically bounce a dime off my face.

But a girl can dream, so I consistently follow a morning regimen that starts with gently scrubbing my face with goop Microderm Instant Glow Exfoliator and then applying Vintner's Daughter Active Botanical Serum, followed by goop All-in-One Nourishing Face Cream. The sensorial experience of massaging my face with lush products soothes me and leaves my skin polished like a new fork before I cover every single square inch of my fair, freckled face, neck, and chest with Iris&Romeo Weekend Skin SPF 50 Vitamin C + Glow. "Vitamin C is a superstar when it comes to both protection and brightening the complexion," says Ava Shamban, MD, a veteran board-certified dermatologist in Santa Monica who trained at Harvard.

On a side note, my devotion to neurotoxins—and ongoing appointments with Wu, who is known to be a conservative injector, over the past 20 years—have served me well, according to experts. Turns out that regularly paralyzing those muscles in my brow, along with a few lasers and peels, prevented me from developing even more lines and sagging. I also boost my circulation with daily infrared yoga at a local studio and then quickly cleanse on the go with Baina body wash, a clean herbal show gel that smells so good I wish they bottled it as a perfume.

Still, there's my neck—and the jowls. "Our clients tell us they feel like they're playing a game of whack-a-mole. They might do a laser for pigmentation and then another concern pops up," says Alana Ungvari, who with Julie Obst, founded L.A. Beauty Connect in 2023 to handhold people through the monumental plastic surgery process, from initial consultation to final recovery. Their clientele is mostly women in the 45 to 55 range. Obst had a facelift at 48 and documented the experience on her social media. "I knew I didn't want to wake up at 50 with this face," she says.

I don't necessarily want to wake up tomorrow morning with *this* face. Marc Mani, MD, a Beverly Hills plastic surgeon who has pioneered advances in facelift and breast surgery, says there is no definitive age that makes you a contender for the scalpel. "It's more of a gestalt," he says of the myriad factors like volume and laxity that contribute to that decision. (For me, cost is a

consideration too. A facelift runs anywhere from \$30k to over \$200k, depending on whom you see and where that doctor practices; cities like New York and Los Angeles are notorious for better surgeons and higher prices.) Mani examines my face and gently concedes that my neck and jawline can't be propped much with injectables. "We're fighting gravity and bone loss that comes with menopause," he says. (I fight that good fight with Dr. Diamond Metacine Instafacial Plasma Duo with hyaluronic acid and growth factors every other morning before I moisturize.)

Mani has an emotional checklist for patients considering more drastic measures too: "I want to make sure they're self-motivated and that they don't expect a facelift to make them happy." Thankfully, I am more than content in my life—even with my inelegant chin. Plus, as a woman in midlife, I couldn't care less what the patriarchy thinks about my jowls. Ultimately, I decide to try one more advanced but under the radar approach that could be considered a weigh station on the freeway to a face lift: a regenerative treatment called **Renuva** that's designed to restore the lost volume in my face and potentially hike up my lazy jawline. FYI: Renuva comes from donated human adipose tissue, aka fat, which frankly does not make me flinch.

"We're creating a matrix or scaffolding that will attract more adipose cells. It creates a honeycomb effect," says Shamban, as she injects my temples, lower face, and mandible with syringes of Renuva. (It barely stings, thanks to anesthetizing lidocaine in the formula.) "You still have nice volume in your face. Only the fat pads around your mouth have thinned," she notes. The one area of my anatomy she can't budge, however, is my neck. It's always the neck. Still, I see a difference immediately. My jawline looks sharper; lines around my mouth are smoothed. But the real results will show up in months as my own fat migrates to the matrix.

In the meantime, Shamban advises me to drill down on my nighttime skin care regimen too: "While we are sleeping, our products, actives and our cellular ability to recover, repair and rejuvenate is in high gear." Knowing that, I'll continue to supplement my in-office treatments with a four-step routine that includes Monastery's Rose Cleansing Oil, Westman Atelier's Suprême C Vitamin C Concentrate, and a nickel-size blob of prescription tretinoin mixed with my goop moisturizer. And once a week: a swipe of goop Beauty 15% Glycolic Acid Overnight Glow Peel pad. "That combo is key for cellular turnover, helping to thicken the dermis and support the production of collagen and elastin," Shamban says. (Ahem, a Lyma Laser Pro tops my birthday wish list too.)

As for a facelift, I'm definitely not ruling it out. It's likely I will make that leap in a few years and I'm putting aside money now and then, just in case. But in the meantime, I'll be singing along with Beyonce to my face, every morning: "You wake up, flawless."

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