

The Botox bonanza

The Botox injection has fast become the most reliable way for women to pamper themselves with a simple form of plastic surgery to smooth frown lines and turn back the years. But doctors have also discovered that the injection - a minute, purified form of the botulism bacteria - is also effective on a range of medical conditions.

Here, BONNIE ESTRIDGE asks four women how Botox has transformed their lives . . .

SWEATING

KATHRYN STUBBS, 48, a clinical assistant, is married to Tom. They have two sons and live Manchester.

She says: OVER the years I had tried just about every antiperspirant on the market but none was completely effective.

I had heard that Botox was being used successfully to stop problems with sweating. I was nervous about it because I knew that botulism was one of Saddam Hussein's chemical weapons, but my doctor colleagues assured me that only a very tiny amount was used.

I decided to have my left arm treated as a 'test'. I wanted to see whether I would notice a difference between my arms. I had eight injections into the sweat glands under my left arm.

Botox injected into muscles can hurt but, because the needle was going into the sweat glands, I felt my skin was just being pinched.

For the first six days I was still sweating and I thought I had wasted my £250. Then the effect suddenly kicked in. My left armpit remained dry while my right armpit was still sweaty.

In the spirit of the 'experiment', I waited for a month to be sure that this was no fluke, then I had my right arm injected. I've had three treatments at nine-month intervals and I could probably wait a year for the next one. Botox has changed my life.

THE TREATMENT

KATHRYN has a condition known as hyperhidrosis - excessive sweating. This is caused by abnormal sensitivity to acetylcholine, the nerve transmitting chemical that 'switches on' the sweat glands and can make them overactive. As acetylcholine is the chemical that Botox inhibits, the injections can effectively switch it off and the overactive sweat glands become dormant.

WRINKLES

GINNY SUMNER is 60 and married to John, who owns a building company. They have three daughters and live in Ascot, Berkshire. Ginny works for her daughter Karen, who has an interior design company. Ginny says: I HAD never heard of Botox or considered any kind of nips and tucks until a couple of weeks ago.

One of Karen's longstanding customers is a cosmetic surgeon and he must have noticed my wrinkled neck because he asked Karen if I'd like a Botox treatment. He said I would really benefit from it. I had taken to wearing scarves and trying to cover up the loose, wrinkly skin around my neck and under my throat, so I jumped at the chance.

He explained what Botox actually was, but I don't think I was listening carefully enough though, as I didn't take in the fact that it was a deadly poison. I went to the surgery in London's Harley Street and had about three injections down each side of my windpipe, into the platysma muscles. This didn't really hurt, but I also had some injections around my upper lip to smooth out the lines and that was quite painful.

After about three days, my neck had definitely smoothed out and doesn't look wrinkly any more, nor does it feel tight as I had imagined it would.

THE TREATMENT

BOTOX was injected into Ginny's platysma muscles - which run vertically from the jaw-line to the collar bone on either side of the Adam's apple. This area is very active when talking, eating and smiling and the muscles can eventually tighten with age and cause the neck to look scraggy. Often, the horizontal lines will deepen into folds. By releasing these muscles, the neck reverts to a younger, more relaxed appearance.

VOICE LOSS

DAVINA DATOO, 43, is married to Guy and works in his car repair business near their home in Knebworth, Hertfordshire.

She says: EIGHT years ago I had flu and ended up with laryngitis. After a few weeks my voice had not recovered, so my GP prescribed antibiotics, but there was still no improvement. Over the next six months I felt as if my neck muscles were tightening when I tried to speak. I was referred to an ear, nose and throat (ENT) specialist, who found nothing wrong.

I was depressed and shut myself away from everyone. I saw a speech therapist for a couple of years and went to relaxation classes, but nothing made any difference.

Eventually, another ENT specialist diagnosed dystonia - a condition in which the brain sends the wrong messages to certain muscles. The nerve endings receive these wrong messages and put the muscles into spasm. The muscle-paralysing effect of Botox was explained to me and I was desperate to try anything.

Under local anaesthetic, the Botox was injected into the Adam's apple area of my throat. It hurt at the time but felt fine immediately afterwards.

The next morning, I was woken by a telephone call from my mother. I braced myself for the usual croaking, but my voice boomed out. It gave us quite a shock.

Since my first Botox injection I have had treatments every six months or so, when the croak returns. No one is sure if it will continue to work, or whether the muscles will recover. All I can say is, I wish that I'd had this treatment years ago.

THE TREATMENT

DAVINA'S impairment of her normal voice production is caused by dystonia of the larynx. The muscle spasms involved cause the vocal cords to stiffen, and this affects the voice. Injecting Botox into the dystonic laryngeal muscles caused the muscles to relax, thus restoring her voice.

HEADACHES

SOPHIE THORPE is a 32-year-old beauty therapist who is married to Glenn, 28, a hairdresser. They live in Putney, South London.

She says: BEING a serial frowner has caused awful lines on my forehead. But when I went to see a cosmetic surgeon I was surprised when he asked me if I ever had tension headaches or migraines.

In fact, I used to get several headaches a week which would often last all day, with a thumping pain in the middle of my forehead.

Apparently it's pretty common for people who tense up their foreheads to have headaches when they are concentrating hard or are under stress, due to pressure on their muscles. So by cosmetically treating my frown lines, the Botox, I was told, would also help relieve me of the headaches. I was pretty doubtful.

I had four injections into the triangular muscle in the forehead just above the bridge of the nose which is where the dreaded vertical tramlines appear. I also had an injection in the horizontal muscles that give you a furrowed brow, the real sign of worry or tension, and the area where my headaches manifested themselves.

The pain was sharp, but it was only transitory. I could see my lines smoothing out within a day or so and over the next two weeks they had virtually disappeared, giving my face a relaxed look.

The headaches didn't stop at once, but they seemed to lessen and by the end of the fortnight when the lines had faded, the familiar, horrible thumping pain had also gone.

The first treatment lasted for about three months and now, having been going for around four years, I need to go for top-ups only every six months. Eventually, the muscles will 'forget' how to frown and I shouldn't need any more injections.

THE TREATMENT

INHIBITING the acetylcholine in forehead muscles with Botox causes them to relax and so eliminates frown and forehead lines, which are a sign that the muscles are overactive through tension, thus often causing headaches.

The disappearance of Sophie's headaches is a common benefit to those who overwork their brow and forehead muscles because, once these muscles are relaxed, the headaches fade and can be kept at bay. So you get rid of the pain and look younger at the same time.