

Can Botox even cure depression?

PAT HAGAN, Daily Mail - 23rd May 2006



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Botox jabs may be a new cure for depression, according to a recent American study.

Clinically depressed patients who had never before been to the wrinkle-busting treatment improved after having the toxin injected in the forehead — and that's not because they felt improved self-confidence as a result of looking younger, say researchers.

Instead, the theory is that by preventing frowning, the toxin is interrupting signals to the brain that indicate the body is under stress or cannot cope.

"Many depressed people can be recognised by their expression, in which the facial muscles create a distressed or sad appearance," says Dr Eric Finzi, a cosmetic surgeon based in Maryland, US, who carried out the study.

"Yet there is evidence that suggests facial expression may play a causal role in our experience of emotion."

Botox is a well-known cosmetic treatment for age-related wrinkles around the eyes and forehead. But the powerful toxin also has a wide range of medical applications, and is used to treat stroke victims' muscle spasms, can ease migraine and even helps people with Parkinson's disease control their movements.

It works by 'paralysing' small groups of muscles to prevent them going into spasm or contracting regularly. This stops the surrounding skin from wrinkling.

But scientists recently discovered that Botox could even help fight cancer by significantly boosting the effects of chemotherapy treatments, speeding up the destruction of tumour cells.

In the latest study, Dr Finzi and his colleague Dr Erika Wasserman recruited ten women aged between 36 and 63 with a medical history of depression.

The average period of depression was 3.5 years, although one patient had been ill for 17 years and had not responded well to conventional treatments.

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Seven out of the ten had been on anti-depressants but continued to be dogged by severe depression before taking part in the study.

Each volunteer — none of whom had had Botox before — underwent a thorough assessment by a clinical psychologist before the experiment began.

They were then injected with the toxin and told to report back in two months' time, when another psychological assessment was carried out.

Using a questionnaire designed to measure the scale of depression, the researchers discovered nine were no longer clinically depressed and the one who still was reported a significant improvement in symptoms.

"Patients who have had their frown lines treated with Botox are perceived by others to be happier," says Dr Kinz.

One woman with an 11-year history of depression said her life "did a 360-degree turnaround" after the experiment. She got a new job and rekindled an old romance.

"Our study is the first to suggest that the enhancement of facial expression of happiness may make patients feel happier," says Dr Kinz.

Some of the volunteers were seen again eight months later and their symptoms had returned as the toxin's effects had worn off.

British cosmetic surgeons say the findings, published in the journal *Dermatological Surgery*, support anecdotal evidence of mood changes in Botox patients.

"We have some patients who were very low but improved after having Botox treatment," says Dr Dinesh Maini, of the Nottingham Laser Clinic.

But Dr Nick Lowe, a dermatologist from the Cranley Clinic in London, said the study was flawed. "I'm not saying it does not help depression, but it needs a proper, controlled study. This could have been a placebo effect."

'Removing wrinkles can make you feel better, but that alone does not deal with the kind of depression I had'

Debbie Timberlake, 45, from Tring, Herts, is convinced Botox helped her recover from the emotional trauma and depression she suffered after her divorce.

The aromatherapist and mother-of-two began treatment at the London Day Surgery Centre two years after developing frown lines due to stress.

"I went through some rough times, and over a period of about 12 months these frown lines seem to come out of nowhere.

"I tried every cream on the market that claimed to beat wrinkles, and they made no difference."

Debbie was struggling with mood swings and anxiety before the treatment. "I wasn't sleeping well and I was very she says.

"As a complementary therapist, I didn't want to take any prescription drugs.

"So I was living on Kalms, the herbal remedy sold in pharmacies. I also took St John's Wort for my depression, which helped a bit but did not get rid of it completely, and I went for some counselling but that eventually ended."

Debbie had the toxin injected into her forehead and around the corners of her eyes at a cost of £300. Within a couple of weeks, she claims, she noticed a significant improvement in her moods.

"I was sleeping better, I was much more cheerful and I wasn't half as tearful as I had been. Everyone said I seemed much more jolly, and I felt less grumpy.

"Removing wrinkles can make you feel better, but that alone does not deal with the kind of depression I had. Now I have the injections every five to six months and I'm officially a Botox babe."