

The age betrayers: How to tackle the tell-tale signs

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What should you do if your face age is 30, but your hand age is closer to 50? What if you have the legs of a 20-something but the knees of a pensioner?

Do you, like Melanie Griffith and Madonna, have your real age betrayed by parts of your body that age fast (knees and hands)?

According to Dr Russell Emerson - NHS dermatologist, member of the British Cosmetic Dermatology Group and consultant dermatologist at the Hove Skin Clinic - this is completely natural.

"We don't age evenly," he explains. "These problems show up most where the skin is thinner, such as on the hands, neck and cleavage.

"Until recently, there was little that could be done to improve matters, but now there are several treatments that can make a difference."

Want to know which ones work best? Here's our guide to the new hi-tech, non-surgical treatments that promise to restore lost youth to sagging, withered skin...

Problem Area: Knees

Celebrity Sufferers: Jerry Hall, Melanie Griffith, Nicole Kidman, Demi Moore

"The skin on Melanie Griffith's legs seems to have aged to an exceptional degree," says Dr Emerson.

"This will have a lot to do with UV exposure from sunbathing, possibly an inadequate diet, not enough vitamin C and zinc, and maybe smoking, which accelerates ageing.

"These contribute to a loss of elasticity and firmness of the skin."

With age, the skin on the knees often wrinkles and sags. Knees also accumulate fat, becoming puffy and lumpy.

Demi Moore, 44, is rumoured to have spent £5,000 on a surgical knee-lift so that her knee age matched her newly youthful face. But new alternatives mean you can get improved knees without scarring.

What works?

Ultra contour: For fatty knees ultra contour is a great, pain-free solution. It applies condensed ultrasound to break up the fatty tissue on and around the knee cap that causes the skin to droop.

This fat is cleared out through the body's natural mechanisms leaving a tighter appearance.

Ultra contour is suitable for most skin types. Most people need one to three treatments, ten days apart.

- *From £450 at The Rejuvenation Clinic, 0870 243 2230, www.therejuvenationclinic.co.uk.*

Smart lipo: Using only local anaesthetic, this hot new "liposuction-lite" treatment removes fat without trauma.

The laser treatment liquefies fat so it is processed naturally by the body, rather than being sucked out.

There are no tell-tale stitches and it can take as little as 20 minutes - so you can get it done in your lunch hour. The laser also helps firm sagging skin.

Titan: This non-invasive skin-tightening procedure uses infrared light to cause lax collagen to contract.

It is the only real alternative to a surgical knee-lift.

- *£600 per treatment for both knees (two treatments normally required)*

Problem Area: Hands



Celebrity Sufferers: Madonna, Teri Hatcher, Cameron Diaz

"Hands are always on show and can give away a woman's age even if her face still looks young," says Dr Lucy Glancey, of Glancey Medical Associates.

"That's partly because the skin and fat on our hands becomes thinner with age, making veins more prominent, but also because of sun-damage," she explains.

"We usually remember to put sunblock on our faces, but not always our hands.

"Increasingly, women are noticing in photographs of themselves that their hands don't match their face.

"Every third or fourth person who comes into our clinics tends to ask about hand rejuvenation."

What Works?

Restylane vital: This is Dr Glancey's favourite new tool for performing non-surgical hand-lifts.

Restylane vital is a clear gel containing hyaluronic acid, a naturally-occurring component in healthy young skin.

The process uses a fine needle to introduce small amounts of gel just under the surface of the skin on the hands, chest or face.

For hands, three sessions of five to ten minutes over six weeks are recommended.

At each session, the patient has 25-30 injections. With a little anaesthetic cream, it should be painless.

The procedure increases the skin's thickness and stimulates natural collagen production, leaving hands smoother and plumper for about six months.

It isn't instant, though. The best results come three to four weeks after the last treatment.

Restylane Information line: 0800 015 5548, www.restylane.com.

Teosyal Meso: Another hyaluronic acid filler, Teosyal is also injected under the skin using a series of small injections to neutralise and rehydrate lines and wrinkles.

Super-purified to remove sensitivity-causing proteins, Teosyal is claimed to be less likely than Restylane to cause a post-procedural reaction, meaning smoother, younger-looking skin with fewer contraindications.

Problem Area: Neck

Celebrity Sufferers: Lisa Kudrow, Sharon Osbourne, Vanessa Williams

Sharon Osbourne has admitted to a surgical neck-lift, and it is rumoured that Lisa Kudrow has also had treatment to remove the "necklace lines" around her neck.

Meanwhile, 44-year-old Ugly Betty star Vanessa Williams' wrinkled neck area is a good few years older than her well-preserved face.

According to Dr Patrick Bowler, author of the Nervous Girl's Guide To Nip And Tuck, "The skin on your neck is particularly thin, making it less elastic and more fragile.

"Thin skin is more susceptible to sun damage, stretching and creasing, which is why our necks give away our age."

As they age, women tend to suffer from a combination of sagging, fatty deposits giving a double chin, crepiness and the development of horizontal "necklace lines" or creases around the neck.

What Works?:

Accent: This treatment uses radiofrequency waves to break down fat, and lift and tighten skin.

It takes around 40 minutes and is not painful. Four to six sessions are recommended, two to four weeks apart.

It takes three to six months for the best results.

- *From £350 for the face.*

Botox: Done with care, Botox injections are the most effective treatment for "necklace lines".

However, Dr Russell Emerson warns: "If you opt for Botox, make sure you go to a very experienced practitioner, as badly done Botox on the neck can affect vocal cords and, in extreme cases, cause breathing difficulties."

Harmony Pixel laser resurfacing: For red, rough, sun-damaged skin on the neck, the newest fractional lasers such as Harmony Pixel provide the same benefits as more drastic skin resurfacing, but are more gentle and less painful for the delicate skin on the neck and down to the cleavage.

This treatment can remove redness, smooth away fine lines and tighten lax skin.

Afterwards, expect redness for two to three days and a mild sunburn-type sensation for three to four hours. Two to three sessions are usually required.

Problem Area: Cleavage

Celebrity Sufferers: Pamela Anderson, Nicollette Sheridan, Sarah Ferguson

Even dedicated users of sunscreen often forget to apply it to their chest, says cosmetic doctor Lucy Glancey.

"It's common for women to have protected their face all their lives with make-up and sunscreen, but to have allowed their cleavage area to remain in the full glare of the sun.

"The result is wrinkled, sunspotted skin that looks older than their complexion," she explains.

What works?

Decoll-therapy: This new therapy combines Botox with laser.

The laser stimulates the cells within the skin that produce collagen and elastin, which controls enlarged pores and improves the skin's radiancy.

It also removes thread veins and broken capillaries, reduces irregular pigmentation, freckling and sunspots and improves crepe-like skin.

At the same time, Botox - injected directly into the muscles - softens and smooths even deep lines and wrinkles on the neck and the décolletage area.

The 30-minute treatment takes effect after a week to 14 days, and lasts three to six months.

Aesthera PPx: The first pain-free, super-fast, intense pulsed light therapy (previous IPL treatments felt like hot fat spattered on the skin) treats blotchy, uneven skin tone, removes brown age spots on the cleavage and hands, and creates more luminous, younger-looking skin.

It takes around ten minutes and has no down-time or side-effects.

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