

Non Surgical Cosmetic Treatments: Not Just a Beauty Routine

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Whether their goal is to turn back the hands of time, look as good as they feel, or age gracefully, Americans are embracing non surgical cosmetic facial treatments to get the quickest results with the least down time. In their quest for a more youthful appearance, however, they should keep in mind that popular non invasive procedures like the nonsurgical face lift and laser skin resurfacing are not just beauty routines. They're medical treatments that should be respected for the benefits and risks associated with them.

According to the American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery (AAFPRS), non invasive cosmetic facial treatments have increased by 48% in women and 64% in men since 2000, with women accounting for the vast majority (82%) of these procedures. AAFPRS surgeons report that more than half of their patients (53%) have had multiple procedures in the same year.

“There are many reasons for that,” says **Donn Chatham, MD**, a board-certified otolaryngologist and facial plastic surgeon with offices in Kentucky and Indiana, and the current president of the American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery. “Most of us want to look as good as we feel and reasonably attractive, and most people have an issue or two that they would admit to being self-conscious about. These procedures can be done rather quickly with a small amount of discomfort, there's very little recovery time, and the results are fairly evident within a day or two. And the economics are much kinder to the person who does a little maintenance from time to time as opposed to the person that undergoes a lengthy surgical procedure.”

The top nonsurgical procedures of choice for both sexes in the United States are BOTOX® Cosmetic, injectable dermal fillers, chemical peels, and microdermabrasion.

Other popular procedures include the nonsurgical face lift and laser skin resurfacing, which is often used to deal with acne scars or general skin care.

[Botox](#) blocks the nerve impulses that cause the muscle contractions that control certain facial expressions which, in turn, cause a breakdown of collagen leading to creases. Included in the category known as [Injectable dermal fillers](#) are commercial products like Juvederm, Restylane, Perlane, Radiesse, Artefill, and Sculptra, as well as autologous fat grafting, which involves taking small amounts of fat from one part of the body and reimplanting it where it's needed. Fillers, which replace the collagen and facial fat that we lose as we age, are used to lift, plump, smooth, and recontour the face. Botox and fillers are often administered in conjunction with each other to achieve the nonsurgical face lift or "liquid face lift".

Like Botox and dermal fillers, [microdermabrasion](#) works best when repeated in a series of skin rejuvenation treatments. It involves using a machine that sprays fine mildly abrasive crystals to remove the epidermis, or outer skin layer consisting primarily of dead skin cells. The crystals and cells are then vacuumed away. This controlled trauma to the skin leaves it looking smoother and healthier, with improvements to both the epidermis (the top layer of skin) and dermis (the middle layer of skin that includes collagen and elastic tissue.)

Chemical peels are another type of skin resurfacing procedure that uses acids or other chemicals to treat sun-damage, wrinkles, blemishes and blotchiness. They can be applied to the entire face or just specific areas, or almost anywhere else on the body for smoother, more even-toned skin.

Like dermabrasion and chemical peels, laser skin treatments help revitalize aged or sun-damaged skin, revealing fresher, younger-looking skin. Other usages include the treatment of birthmarks, acne scars, vascular lesions (such as port-wine stains), and skin diseases like vitiligo and psoriasis. Moles, warts, tattoos, and unwanted body hair can also be removed by laser skin treatment.

While these procedures may all seem to be mainly cosmetic in nature – more beauty procedure than surgical procedure – they are considered surgical, albeit less invasive than many other cosmetic surgery procedures. There are real risks involved that should be understood prior to committing to treatment. For example, using too much Botox or injecting it into the wrong spot can result in a drooping eyebrow or drooling. If dermal fillers are overinjected, you may end up with more augmentation than you were counting on, at least temporarily. With both microdermabrasion and chemical peels there is a risk of hyperpigmentation (dark spots) of the skin. Infection, bruising, and swelling are all temporary side effects of any procedure.

"I tell patients, 'You get one face, and let's do everything we can that's reasonable to take care of it, both for health and appearance,'" says [Dr. Chatham](#). "To think that these procedures are no more involved than a trip to the beauty salon or a massage or any other casual event is really frightening."

For best results with your noninvasive cosmetic procedure, consult with one or more board-certified plastic surgeons or dermatologists and make sure they are trained and experienced in the specific treatment that interests you. They should be able to assess your situation, answer your questions, lay out the risks and benefits, and determine if you are a viable candidate for the procedure.

First-time patients can ease their way into noninvasive cosmetic treatments by requesting one of the temporary fillers that last up to a year to “try on” the results. Start with a conservative approach to make sure you like what you see, and sample just one treatment at a time so you can discern what works and what doesn’t in your particular case.