

## Young women turn to Botox

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Lisa Durante spends Dh17,000 a year on treatments. Pawan Singh / The National

Women as young as 20 are undergoing cosmetic procedures such as Botox and fillers before they even have wrinkles, according to beauty experts.

They say women in the UAE are seeking treatments to preserve their looks at an increasingly young age.

Some practitioners have turned away potential clients because they were thought to be too young, but say other clinics do not impose strict age restrictions.

Manon Pilon, a skincare consultant and author of *Anti-Ageing: the Cure*, said: “Globally people tend to start any time between the ages of 25 and 60 but in this region, it is even younger.

“It is not unusual for 18-year-olds to have fillers and treatments to enhance their lips and start having Botox from the ages of 20 to 25.”

The consultant, who spoke at last week’s Dubai Congress on Anti-Ageing and Aesthetic Medicine, added: “It is partly down to money and the fact everything here is about luxury and beauty. This is a society which judges on beauty.

“There are lots of magazines published in Dubai which focus on luxury, but Abu Dhabi is really emerging now too as a destination for these treatments.”

Botox involves the botulinum toxin being injected into wrinkle lines to freeze facial muscles and temporarily remove frown lines.

Once the preserve of cosmetic surgeons, it is now offered by dermatologists and medical spas.

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Clinics offering treatments such as Botox, which costs about Dh2,000 (US\$540) per injection, have to register with the Department of Health but do not have age restrictions. One clinic contacted by The National suggested the best age to start was 20.

Fillers involve injections into laughter lines and are also used to plump up lips. Both procedures come with health risks. Earlier this year the Food and Drug Administration in the US launched an investigation into four child deaths linked to the use of Botox and similar muscle-relaxing products.

Despite fears about the long-term health impacts, Bryan Durocher, president of Durocher Enterprises which helps set up medical spas, said the trend for younger patients was likely to be seen in the UAE as treatments became more available.

Medical spas, offering cosmetic procedures such as laser hair removal, wrinkle injection treatments and facial peel, are expected to grow in the UAE by 34 per cent by 2010, he said. "Twenty per cent of 25- to 30-year-olds in the US have had Botox and that is being mirrored here. The ones taking it up are getting younger. Everyone desires a youthful appearance."

Dr Maria Angelo-Khattar, director of Aesthetica Clinic in Dubai where about 80 per cent of patients are Emirati, said staff had turned away women in their early 20s seeking Botox.

"Non-surgical options mean more people want to look younger but we do not like to give anyone Botox unless they are at least in their late 20s," she said.

"The whole focus of anti-ageing treatments has changed. It is now about the young wanting to stay young. They do not want to see the first signs of ageing and are not prepared to wait until they do.

"We would never treat 18- or 20-year-olds as we do not want people to become obsessed. No one needs it that young because your skin is still regenerating in your early 20s."

Lisa Durante, who has lived in Dubai for seven years, started Botox injections in her 20s, before she had a single wrinkle.

Ten years on, her efforts to maintain her youthful looks have become an expensive habit, costing about Dh17,000 a year.

"I was not old-looking when I first tried it but it was an occupational hazard as I was surrounded by perfect, glossy images in my previous role as a magazine editor.

"I was not unhappy with the way I looked, but once you start it is very difficult to stop."

She has Botox injections into her forehead and around her eyes three times a year, fillers on her face and regular laser skin treatment.

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“It was not born out of an obsession with staying young or a fear of getting old, but having started at that age and incorporated it into my life, it is now like going to the dentist.

“It is an expensive thing but I certainly do not regret broaching that avenue at the age I did.”

Ms Durante said she would not encourage her daughter, aged seven, to start having Botox too early as an adult.

Dr Dani Kayle, a plastic surgeon in Jumeirah’s Manchester Clinic, said: “I have younger patients who are using Botox but it is a different concept to the way it is used for older women.

“Younger women use it for eyebrow elevation. In the past it was done surgically but now we can use Botox to relax the muscle that pulls the eyebrow down.”

Spending on cosmetics and personal care in the Middle East has risen by 12 per cent each year for the past three, with sales valued at Dh7.7bn last year. In the UAE alone the figure for 2006 was Dh1.5bn, making it one of the world’s biggest spenders on beauty procedures.

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