



# Harvard Women's Health Watch

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## Ways to preserve youthful skin—without cosmetic surgery

*You can't turn back the clock, but you can minimize the appearance of wrinkles and other signs of aging with these noninvasive techniques.*

Age isn't kind to skin. Years of accumulated sun exposure leave their mark in the form of fine lines, wrinkles, and discoloration. By the time you reach your 60s or 70s, much of the damage has already been done, but that damage isn't indelible.

"There are a lot of things you can do about the changes that time, aging, and sun exposure have brought about," says Dr. Kenneth Arndt, clinical professor of dermatology at Harvard-affiliated Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center and medical editor of the Harvard Medical School Special Health Report, *Skin Care and Repair* ([www.health.harvard.edu/SCR](http://www.health.harvard.edu/SCR)).

The first step is to slow the pace of further damage by staying out of the sun and by wearing adequate sun protection whenever you are outside. That means completely covering exposed skin with an SPF30 or higher sunscreen and wearing sun-protective clothing, wraparound sunglasses, and a wide-brimmed hat that shields your face, neck, and ears.

### Time erasers

To minimize wrinkles and age spots that have already etched themselves into your skin, Dr. Arndt suggests the following non-surgical cosmetic techniques.



Image: American Society of Plastic Surgeons

Neuromodulators such as Botox and Dysport reduce the appearance of wrinkles in the forehead and around the eyes.

### Smooth and fill

The most common skin rejuvenation tools Dr. Arndt uses on his patients are dermal fillers and neuromodulators.

- ▶ **Neuromodulators** (Botox, Dysport, Xeomin) are injections to relax the muscles that create the appearance of wrinkles when you smile, frown, or laugh. "These products diminish the frown lines and forehead lines and sometimes the crow's feet, and they do it well, reliably, and safely. People are almost always happy with the results," Dr. Arndt says.
- ▶ **Dermal fillers** are injections that plump up sagging areas of skin. They're sometimes called "liquid facelifts," because they can create a more youthful look without the downtime and risks associated with cosmetic surgery. Dermal fillers are often used to soften the "laugh lines" that run from the side of the nose down to the mouth.

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- ▶ Diet and exercise help relieve knee osteoarthritis.
- ▶ Walking linked to lower breast cancer risk.
- ▶ Women may need fewer bone density screenings.

## FIVE THINGS TO DO THIS MONTH

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**2 Walk the dog.** Getting out with your pet is good for your health. (page 3)

**3 Know your breast cancer risks.** Ask your doctor whether you qualify for preventive drugs. (page 4)

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**5 Relieve achy knees.** Diet plus exercise help. (page 8)

## Youthful skin

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Often the two treatments are used together. Neuromodulators diminish frown lines, while fillers plump up the appearance of the lower face, cheeks, chin, and laugh lines. Combining the two enhances and prolongs their effects. Dr. Arndt says both techniques are safe, with very few side effects. Botox and similar injections may cause a little bruise at the injection site or a slight heaviness of the brow, but these effects are temporary. Fillers also may cause some slight, temporary bruising. Also remember that the effects of these treatments are temporary. To keep seeing results, you'll need to return for repeat sessions—Botox two or three times a year, and fillers once or twice a year.

### Rejuvenate

For skin discoloration, including freckles, age spots, and liver spots, Dr. Arndt recommends laser resurfacing or pulsed light therapy.

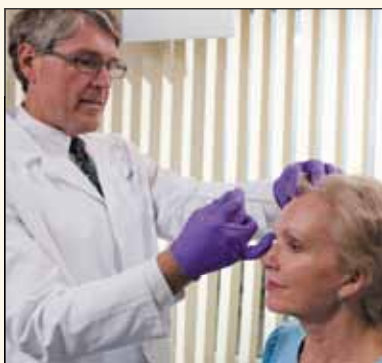
Fractional laser resurfacing aims very small beams of high-energy light at the skin to smooth and tighten the surface and stimulate the development of collagen—the protein that gives skin its elasticity. Because fractional laser resurfacing works only on fractions of the larger areas treated at a time, redness is minimized and healing is quick. However, you may have some itching and swelling in the treated area.

Pulsed light therapy exposes the skin to intense broadband wavelengths of light energy—unlike the laser, which emits one specific wavelength. This technique, which also stimulates col-

lagen production, reduces the look of sun damage and brown spots and minimizes wrinkles. Side effects are usually mild, but there may be some redness afterward.

### Who should you see for cosmetic techniques?

Although both dermatologists and medspa technicians can perform many cosmetic treatments, some medspa estheticians are not well-trained in these procedures. Make sure the professional you choose is experienced in the treatment you're planning to have.



Botox



Chemical peel



Microdermabrasion



Fractional laser treatment

### Less costly options

The treatments listed above can be pricey—Botox injections range from \$300 to \$700 per session, and fractional laser resurfacing can exceed \$1,000. If you don't want to invest quite as much money, consider these options:

**Chemical peels** use chemicals such as glycolic acid to strip away the outer layer of damaged skin. "They're reasonably mild," Dr. Arndt says. "The skin is left refreshed, a little pink, and shiny." A glycolic acid peel can cost as little as \$80, but it needs to be repeated every few weeks or months to continue showing an effect.

**Microdermabrasion** uses tiny exfoliating crystals to buff off the top layer of skin and reveal the smoother surface below. Although the technique is different from a chemical peel, the results are similar, according to Dr. Arndt. The cost is around \$100.

**Mild laser resurfacing** (Clear + Brilliant) is a gentler version of fractional laser resurfacing. It involves smaller areas of skin, and the beam is less intense, so there's less downtime and discomfort afterward than with a traditional laser resurfacing procedure. The cost ranges from \$200 to \$500, depending on the area of skin treated.

### Where to go

Most of these techniques are available at both dermatologists' offices and "medspas"—nonmedical facilities that offer a range of cosmetic services. Well-trained estheticians can perform some of these procedures. However,

Dr. Arndt cautions, "In some spas and similar offices, people who are not well trained do some of the treatments. That's where it gets dangerous."

In October, a study in *JAMA Dermatology* found that the percentage of lawsuits from skin laser surgery performed by nonphysicians more than doubled from 2008 to 2011, calling into question the safety of some medspas. If you do decide to see an esthetician instead of a dermatologist, make sure the practitioner is licensed in your state and is certified by the National Coalition of Estheticians, Manufacturers/Distributors and Associations (NCEA). ♥