

[HEALTH FEATURES](#) >>

Cosmetic acupuncture targets tiny wrinkles

by [Gail Johnson](#) on September 2nd, 2009 at 9:54 AM



Rather than getting Botox, some people are turning to acupuncture needles to smooth out their faces by bringing their body into a more balanced state.

Nicole Stefanopoulos has an eye for detail. The freelance photographer, who used to split her time between Vancouver and New York, started out in the early '90s covering rock bands—the White Stripes, the Strokes, and Hole among them—but recently shifted her focus to fine-art photography. She says that after years of going to concerts and after-parties, she was ready for a change. Plus, all those late nights were taking a toll, and she admits she started noticing that she didn't bounce back as quickly as she had when she was younger. And at the age of—gasp—38, she began to see changes in her face: little lines around her mouth and what she calls “heavy” skin around her eyes.

So upon moving back to Vancouver permanently last year, Stefanopoulos asked friends what she could do to smooth out her face. Not comfortable with the idea of botulinum toxin—better known as the hugely popular Botox Cosmetic, a protein produced by the bacterium *Clostridium botulinum* that’s injected into the skin—she was intrigued by cosmetic acupuncture.

“Based on the information I had about Botox, I didn’t dig where it came from and didn’t want that stuff in my own skin,” Stefanopoulos says in a phone interview. “But I didn’t want these lines to get deeper.”

She chose cosmetic acupuncture and went for 10 sessions of having little needles inserted in various parts of her face, and toward the end, her wrinkles (or “laugh lines”, as she puts it) started to fade.

“There was one night when I was washing my face and I just looked in the mirror and thought, “I’m so stoked!” ”

Before that point, she hadn’t tried acupuncture, the traditional Chinese medical technique that involves stimulating specific points on the body with thin needles. Those points are said to connect with meridians throughout the body, along which a person’s *qi*, or vital energy, flows. According to practitioners, when that energy is blocked, it leads to an imbalance and ultimately disease, and acupuncture helps unblock that energy and bring the body to a state of balance.

Although acupuncture has been around for thousands of years, its use for cosmetic purposes might seem like a strictly modern-day application.

Not so, according to Maryam Mahanian, a traditional Chinese medicine practitioner in Vancouver.

“It used to be used on emperors’ concubines,” says the head of the Acupuncture & Chinese Medicine Clinic of Vancouver in a phone interview. “But the marketing of it is new.”

Mahanian, who’s been in practice for seven years and treats infertility and skin conditions, among other things, trained in Toronto with Shali Rassouli, a traditional Chinese medicine practitioner who also uses acupuncture to reduce cellulite.

“The theory of it just made sense to me,” Mahanian says of using acupuncture for cosmetic reasons. “It encourages circulation and collagen production and overall health. And if you’re in very good health, your skin will also manifest that.”|When you feel better, you look better.”|When you feel better, you sleep better, you have more energy.” (Collagen is a fibrous protein produced in the skin’s dermal layer that helps skin hold its shape.)

Mahanian explains that she does a full health assessment with every patient at the outset to determine what other problems they might be experiencing, whether it’s stress, poor nutrition, menstrual pain, digestive issues, or fatigue. As a result, she might insert needles—as many as 40 in total—in locations on a person’s body aside from her face, hands, and feet, which are all possible locations for treating wrinkles and frown lines. “Their underlying health problems are addressed,” Mahanian says, noting that about 30 percent of her patients are men.

When using acupuncture for cosmetic purposes, she suggests two sessions a week for five weeks, followed by monthly “maintenance” visits. (Each treatment costs \$100.)

For those who are freaked out by needles, Mahanian says the ones used on the face are thinner than those used on other parts of the body, and people tend to feel nothing at all or a sensation of pressure but not pain. She says that results are more subtle and gradual than those achieved by plastic surgery or Botox, the latter of which creates effects that last for up to four months.

Botox works by limiting the activity of muscles that cause frown lines. According to the manufacturer’s Web site, Botox Cosmetic can have life-threatening side effects, including trouble swallowing, speaking, or breathing, and can even cause death, all of which can occur hours to weeks after an injection. Sometimes,

the botulinum toxin can affect the body in places other than the injection site and cause symptoms of botulism, such as double vision, change or loss of voice, trouble saying words clearly, and loss of bladder control.

Stefanopoulos says she did have side effects from her treatment—positive ones. “When they put in the needles, you feel really relaxed,” she says. “I would fall asleep, or go into a really deep state. It’s different for everyone; you can meditate or just drift away. It’s almost like an addiction, because you just want to go back.

“It opens up your energy and blockages in the body, and you can actually feel that when you’re in tune with your body,” she adds, saying that the treatment also had a positive effect on some of her digestive issues.

“It sounds crazy, but when there’s an unblockage, that energy just rushes through you.” I would feel that for a couple of hours afterward. You know how you leave a really good concert but you’re still on a high afterward? I’d feel like that.”



SEE THE LATEST PRINT EDITION

GEORGIA STRAIGHT

[History](#) | [About Us](#) | [Masthead](#) | [Careers](#) | [Advertise](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Covers](#)

LEGAL

[Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms & Conditions](#)

© 2020 VANCOUVER FREE PRESS. BEST OF VANCOUVER, BOV AND GOLDEN PLATES ARE TRADE-MARKS OF VANCOUVER FREE PRESS PUBLISHING CORP.