



Health | Fitness

Give your hands back their youthful look

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(Courtesy Photos)

Paula Hunt
Express-News Staff Writer

Pity the hand.

We indulge our faces with creams to pamper the delicate eye area, balms to moisten our lips, creams to hydrate our skin, exfoliants to keep it soft and sunscreens to protect it.

Our hands? They get a little lotion now and then – if they're lucky.

Yet our hands bear the brunt of daily living, from cleaning the house with chemical-laden products to simply being exposed to the elements.

Add to this an aging process that – particularly for women – can be less than kind and your hands can look older than the rest of you: ropey blue veins, prominent tendons, freckles, age spots and crêpe-paper texture.

But don't throw up your hands in surrender. Cosmetic procedures for

rejuvenating faces are now being used to restore youth to hands. New products that specifically attack signs of aging are hitting the shelves.

Dr. Bonnie Furner, a board certified dermatologist in private practice in San Antonio and a clinical professor at the University of Texas Health Science Center, says she frequently hears patients bemoaning that their hands are starting to look like their mother's – or grandmother's.

"There are several issues about how our hands age us," says Furner. "The first is skin texture and pigmentation changes, which are a function of ultraviolet exposure.

"The other issue is that with both aging and ultraviolet exposure you have the loss of the dermis layer and fat, so basically you have skin just draping over the veins."

Cosmetic rescue treatments range from low-tech therapies that improve texture and appearance to high-tech ones that target spots and stimulate collagen production.

Age spots ("liver spots") can be frozen or lightened with products containing hydroquinone or retinols (like Retin-A). Microdermabrasion and glycolic peels can also lessen these signs of aging.

While useful, these treatments often take months of use before you see a dramatic difference.

More expensive laser procedures offer the quickest results.

Furner prefers to use Intense Pulse Light (IPL) – a laser-like device – when someone has a lot of signs of aging.

"The light targets the brown in the spots and it basically makes them temporarily darken and then peel off," says Furner. "A person does anywhere between one and six treatments until you're where you want to be. It can be very helpful for the skin texture, too."

Dr. Jaime Garza, a board-certified plastic surgeon in private practice in San Antonio, says that he has been seeing more and more patients who want hand rejuvenation. He recommends IPL treatments in combination with one of the physician-only beauty product lines he carries.

He'd also like to see more people taking care of the skin on their hands (as well as the rest of their bodies) by protecting them with a sunscreen with SPF of at least 15.

"We see a lot of premature aging here," Garza says. "The sun takes a big toll on skin, so sun protection is the easiest and best thing you can do to prevent damage."

But while topical treatments can improve texture and tone, they won't do anything to lessen the appearance of veins and tendons that begin to rise like

arêtes across the backs of your hands.

Although not approved for use on the back of the hands, dermal fillers are used by some doctors to plump up this area.

"People are using Sculptra and Restylane in hands, but the problem with both of them is you get lumps," says Dr. Sydney Coleman, (http://www.lipostructure.com/about_drcoleman.html) a board-certified plastic surgeon in private practice at Tribeca Plastic Surgery in New York City and a clinical assistant professor at the New York University Medical School.

"With Restylane, if you put it in the subcutaneous plane, it can migrate very easily and move around."

As an alternative, Coleman has developed an autologous fat transfer (<http://www.lipostructure.com/breastaug.html>) procedure where he extracts fat from patients' bodies and deposits it into the backs of their hands.

"The idea of putting fat in the back of the hands is not to make them fat, because young hands are not fat," says Coleman.

The purpose, he says, is to give them an attractive fullness that helps to disguise the offending tendons and veins.

Coleman makes small incisions into the backs of the hands and injects tiny amounts of fat. The entire procedure including fat harvesting takes about an hour and a half and costs \$12,000. Coleman says he performs one or two a month.

"I've followed patients for 10 or 12 years, and they continue to have a rejuvenating effect," Coleman says. "If someone loses a lot of weight or becomes ill, they can lose a lot of the fullness, but otherwise it seems to last for a very long time."

Noninvasive treatments are less enduring.

While lasers and IPL zap existing spots, they don't prevent others from popping up. Topical creams must be used on a regular basis to keep hyperpigmentation at bay.

And if you don't prevent your hands from further ultraviolet radiation damage, you've spent a lot of money for nothing.

To keep hands looking younger and protect your investment, Furner recommends moisturizing frequently with products that contain alpha hydroxy acid or glycolic acid. These help reduce the appearance of brown spots and improve the skin's texture.

"Dryness doesn't cause wrinkles," Furner says, "But it makes them more prominent."

Doctors say women are starting to recognize that it isn't just the area above

their necks that tells the world how old they are – and they want to do something about it.

"When your hands get near your face and they don't reflect a similar age, it's a giveaway," says Coleman.

"I tell people whatever they're doing for their face, they should be doing for their hands."



(Courtesy Photos)

phunt@express-news.net