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Shave off years, with a little help

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YOU look just like your father, they tell you. Hey, not so fast. Though most men realize that certain signs of aging are inevitable, more are doing what women have done for years — putting the brakes on looking older. And they're seeking cosmetic medical treatments in record numbers.

Although men still comprise only 12% of all cosmetic surgery patients, a growing number are seeking minimally invasive procedures to take the edge off aging. From 2000 to 2005, the number of men seeking these procedures increased 44% to 911,850, according to the American Society of Plastic Surgery.

The two biggest factors driving this trend, say experts, are the advances in products used to minimize wrinkles, and a growing feeling among men that getting cosmetic procedures is acceptable. "Men used to say, 'So what? I'm a guy. Who cares?' " says Dr. Brian Kinney, a Los Angeles-based plastic surgeon. "Now they do care. A lot of guys reach age 35 and want to nip any signs of aging fast. They consider it part of their upkeep."

Men may be slower to get treatment because their skin doesn't age as quickly as women's or in the same way. According to Dr. John Gray, a medical advisor to Procter & Gamble, men start out with more collagen (the stuff in the dermal layer of the skin that makes it plump), then lose it more gradually. (Women lose collagen rapidly after menopause, when estrogen levels plummet.)

But men don't take care of their skin like women do: They are less likely to use sun protection and moisturizers, so they suffer more skin damage. "Men have a running start, but they throw it away through negligence." Gray says.

After the damage is done, many men are turning to injections of wrinkle-minimizers Botox and Restylane. "Ten years ago, very few men were being injected. Today more than 10% of my patients are men getting injections," Kinney says.

The number of visits for men seeking Botox treatments increased 233% (to 313,519) from 2000 to 2005, according to the plastic surgeon society. The sooner the treatment starts, the better: "When used early enough, Botox can keep a dynamic wrinkle — the kind even kids get when they raise their foreheads — from becoming a static, or permanent, wrinkle," says Dr. Andrew Da Lio, assistant professor of plastic and reconstructive surgery at UCLA. Effects last up to four months.

The filler agent Restylane (hyaluronic acid) is typically injected into the lower two-thirds of the face to fill out folds between the nose and mouth, and to soften a chin that's getting pointy. Results typically last six months.

With both procedures, side effects are rare, though patients may experience slight bruising or swelling. If a patient is over-injected with Botox, he may get a droopy brow, which will last a few months. With Restylane, patients may get lumps in the injection area.

Men are also looking to tighten and smooth their skin with laser resurfacing and microdermabrasion. Laser resurfacing tightens skin and reduces pigment spots. Microdermabrasion is like an aggressive facial — it's a skin-sanding technique that buffs off dead skin cells and suctions out impurities. The skin will look fresher — but results are short-lived.

When choosing a doctor for cosmetic treatments, men should see a specialist who treats a lot of men. That's because men have thicker skin and a different facial architecture than women, so practitioners have to adjust for this. For instance, Da Lio says, when applying Botox to the eyebrows, practitioners can increase the arch in a woman's brow, which looks natural. But men's brows are naturally flat or only slightly arched, so if the arch in a man is lifted, he will look weird.

The better bet is to prevent wrinkles from occurring in the first place. To do that, men should wear sunscreen every day, even if they're just going to the office. "Sun is the worst offender. UVA rays degrade the dermal layer in the skin and accelerate aging. But most men still don't wear a daily sunscreen," says Dr. Mary Lupo, a dermatologist and medical director for the Lupo Center for Aesthetic and General Dermatology in New Orleans.

Two new sunscreens hitting the shelves this month are better than anything else on the market, says Dr. Leslie Baumann, professor of dermatology at the University of Miami and author of "The Skin Type Solution." La Roche-Posay is introducing Anthelios, which contains the chemical mexoryl. Just approved by the Food and Drug Administration, mexoryl provides greater protection than other sunscreen ingredients against UVA rays. And Neutrogena is introducing products with Helioplex, which is formulated to have longer-lasting UVA protection.

Besides avoiding sun exposure — and, of course, not smoking — men should make sure they get enough water to drink and also use a daily moisturizer. In dry climates, people who studiously avoid the sun still get leathery, dried-out looking skin because their skin is often parched, Da Lio says.

At night, using retinoids, such as Retin-A or Tazorac, accelerates the sloughing of the top layer of skin cells and leaves skin looking fresher, with better texture. "Everyone is a candidate. Start young and use them forever," Lupo says. (Baumann adds that almost

every dermatologist she knows, even the men, use these nightly.)

Diet and supplements also play a role in good-looking skin. Dermatologists encourage a diet rich in vegetables and fruits whose antioxidants fight tissue damage. Taking antioxidant supplements — specifically vitamins C and E, and coenzyme Q10 — or applying them topically can also help keep skin looking younger, Baumann says.

Recognizing a growing market, some skin-care product manufacturers, such as Hugo Boss, are creating skin-care lines specifically for men — including moisturizers, cleansers and sunscreens. Dermatologists applaud their arrival: "Any product that makes them take care of their skin better is positive," Lupo says.

But that doesn't mean there's anything magically different about them: Men's skin products generally have the same active ingredients as women's, although they're formulated to be less sticky and greasy, and have manlier packaging.

Besides giving their skin more attention, many men are also becoming fussier about unwanted hair. Laser hair removal has gotten much better thanks to improvements in the technology, and men are seeking this treatment to clean up the nape of their necks, remove hair between their eyebrows, or eliminate the hair on their backs.

Many men still go for the bigger procedures — face-lifts and eyelifts — but less often than they did. The number of men getting face-lifts and cosmetic eyelid surgeries dropped 30% and 43% respectively from 2000 to 2005, as increasing numbers opted for the needle over the knife. Deep chemical peels in men dropped off 46%.

"The tight look is out," Da Lio says. "It's distracting to see in an older man, as is a waxy complexion from a too-deep skin peel. Men can't hide behind makeup or a hairstyle like women can. So the trick is to keep the changes subtle."

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