

A few pointers for a new face

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Facial acupuncture is the Hollywood star's shortcut to younger looking skin. Precious Williams tries it

Who wouldn't want to look 10 years younger in just 20 minutes? In America, you can - as long as you don't mind lying in a darkened room with needles protruding from your face, eyes and ears.

The rich, the vain and the famous (reportedly Madonna, Gwyneth Paltrow and Cher) are having weekly "acupuncture facelifts" to ward off their wrinkles.

The "facelift" is administered by a doctor of Oriental Medicine (or OMD), who spikes your face with disposable, hair-thin needles that - allegedly - turn back time and halt the physical manifestations of ageing.

The needles are inserted into wrinkles and frown lines, eventually making them vanish.

The stimulation brings blood rushing to the face, which makes it look flushed. Apparently, after a few sessions, eyes brighten, skin feels firmer, lips become plumper and blemishes vanish.

"Facial acupuncture stimulates the cells to lay down new collagen fibres under wrinkles, thereby filling them in," says New York acupuncturist Billy Villano. "And the needles relax muscles, which combats sagging in facial areas. The results are amazing."

Determined to find out just how "amazing" facial acupuncture might be, I made an appointment with Clarence Lu, a New York-based OMD.

"Why do you want facial acupuncture?" he asks, peering at my skin. "I've heard it's popular with celebrities and I want to try it for myself," I say.

Lu looks unimpressed. "I suppose it's a better option than Botox injections," he says. "The facial acupuncture works by making energy circulate properly around your face, but energy needs to circulate properly around your whole body, not just your face."

"If you had severe wrinkles or a double chin, I couldn't promise that this would eliminate them. But it would definitely make them look better"

Lu offers to give me traditional acupuncture but refuses to administer facial acupuncture, saying he doesn't see the point.

Traditional acupuncture has been practised for centuries and is used to treat many ailments, from migraines to menstrual disorders.

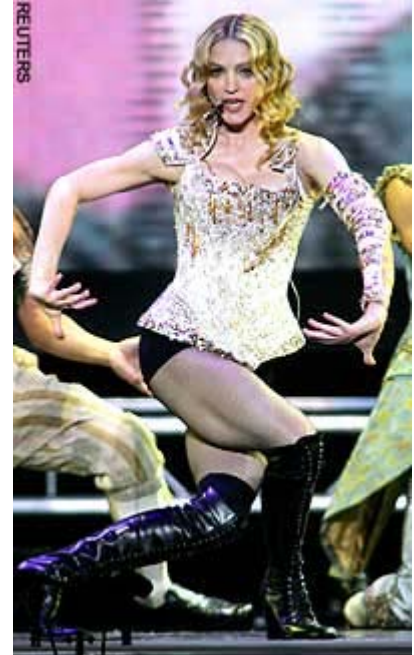
It focuses on the entire body by regulating one's flow of energy, or "qi", and addressing the "energy blockages" that might be causing the problem.

Consult an acupuncturist for help to quit smoking and he will also examine your eating and sleeping habits, the condition of your pulse and your sex life. Acupuncture facelifts fly in the face of that philosophy, focusing solely on the appearance of the facial skin and features.

"Some women ask to have the needles placed all around the edges of their lips so that they swell up," says Lu, disdainfully. "It's something I won't do. It would be very, very painful."

Facial acupuncture is indeed ridiculously self-indulgent - but according to Hollywood stars, who incorporate acupuncture facelifts into their primping routines, it works. It makes you look young and bursting with health, even if you are a chain-smoker who lives on junk food.

Part of the beauty of these facelifts is their accessibility; they take about as long as a manicure. Afterwards, there is no scar and no permanently surprised expression. The only downside is that treatment is exorbitantly expensive.



Madonna: said to be an acupuncture fan

A half-hour session costs about \$150 (£80) and it takes around 25 weekly sessions to achieve lasting results (50 sessions if you're extremely wrinkly).



Effective: but facial treatment is exorbitantly expensive

Finally, after I had stayed up all night meeting a deadline, acupuncturist Billy Villano agreed that I looked tired and washed-out enough to require an acupuncture facelift.

"This won't be as dramatic as a surgical facelift," he says. "If you had severe wrinkles or a double chin, I couldn't promise that this would eliminate them. But it would definitely make them look better."

I lie back in his Brooklyn office, while he takes my pulse, inspects my tongue and palpates my stomach (from this he can tell the condition of my "qi" and if I have energy blockages that prevent my skin from glowing).

Apparently, I have "spleen qi deficiency" - which, Villano quickly points out, does not mean that there is anything actually wrong with my spleen.

"It means that, going by the Chinese definition of things, your spleen energy is a bit depleted, which might make you appear a bit bloated. It could be caused by stress, or consuming too many ice-cold beverages, or by too much work," says Villano.

Then, he pinches my cheek and inserts tiny needles with a tapping motion. I make the mistake of smiling bravely at Villano and an intense pain shoots from my cheek to my ear.

This is good, apparently - it is my stuck qi circulating around my tired face. Two needles are inserted (thankfully painlessly) into my forehead to energise me and brighten my complexion.

Another needle goes into my chin, three into each ear and a few around my eyes, to widen them. The final needle is tapped into the top of my head, to wake me up. But, instead, I drift off to sleep.

After 35 minutes, Villano whisks the needles out (this part doesn't hurt at all). My skin looks markedly brighter and fresher than it did when I arrived. I had planned to go home for a nap after my acupuncture facelift, but I feel so alert and refreshed that I arrange to meet a friend for lunch instead.

"What have you been up to?" my friend asks, when I walk into the restaurant.
"Your skin looks amazing."

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Treatment: 'my stuck qi circulates around my tired face'