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Home UK World Companies Markets Global Economy Lex Comment Management Personal Finance Life & Arts  
 Arts || FT Magazine || Food & Drink || House & Home || Style || Books || Pursuits || Sport || Travel || Columnists || How To Spend It || Tools

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## Wrinkle-free zone: Anti-Ageing Health & Beauty Show

By William Leith

How far do you want to roll back the years and how much would you spend?



Jane Lewis provides the Thermage treatment, which creates plumper-looking skin that smoothes wrinkles

Something was happening to the 11,300 people who visited the UK's first anti-ageing exhibition at Olympia in London last week, and they didn't like it at all. Bits of them were falling apart. Their outer layers were becoming slacker and heavier. They were developing dark spots and crusty patches. But they had come in a spirit of defiance. Over and over again, they told me the same story. They had, they seemed to remember, loved being young. And, now that they were 40, or 50, or 60, they were looking for ways to turn back the clock. They had money, and they were prepared to spend it.

They were looking for a miracle.

There were more than 100 exhibitors at the anti-ageing show. Maybe they could perform this miracle. They had, they promised, discovered new and innovative ways to turn back the clock. They were ready to inject Botox and Restylane into sagging faces. They were primed to ply you with enzymes, acids, and mild electric shocks, to heat you up or to freeze your fat cells to death. They had come at the problem from all possible angles. Many had hired very young women to pitch their goods.

It is early on Sunday and customers sample goods, haggle. They are mostly women, mostly middle-aged, mostly in pairs. Some have husbands and partners in tow. It's like a farmers market for anti-ageing products – except there are lots of people lying on hospital beds.

Iain Taylor and Suzanne Baxter, two entrepreneurs who launched a skincare range in 2011, are pitching their product, Vitabella. Taylor, 49, used to be a product designer. He worked on package design for the HP Sauce range. Baxter was in human resources. Then they had an idea – to launch a skincare range based on aloe vera, olive oil, and hyaluronic acid, which helps the skin retain moisture. Taylor tells me they've also designed a mask, which is made of viscose. The mask is their unique selling point.

I put the mask on my face. There are holes for the eyes, mouth, and nose. It looks sinister but you get used to it. You keep it on for 10 minutes. Taylor and Baxter have, they say, invested £100,000 of their own money on the range. The logo contains a plant motif. My mask begins to peel off, which, says Taylor, demonstrates that the skin on my face needs hydration. "Your skin is always drying out. You must keep feeding it," he says. As a package designer, Taylor understands the importance of skin; his own, it must be said, looks fine and clear.

At another stall Jamie Chang, 29, pitches an anti-wrinkle cream for a company called 111 Skin.

"One hundred and eleven?" I ask. As in: years old?

"No – One One One."

"Does it stop wrinkles?" I say.

"No. But ... the chance is less."

This, it strikes me, is the main reason for this exhibition – to reduce wrinkles. Not to make you younger – but to make you look younger. That's why we're here, in a venue where you'd normally expect to be at a show appraising speedboats, or sports cars, or posh garden furniture. The "cosmetic interventions" industry, as the Department of Health called it in a 2013 review, is growing very fast. In 2005 it was worth £720m, by 2010 the figure was £2.3bn. By 2015 the forecast is that it will have risen to £3.6bn. This booming marketplace represents a cultural change; just a short time ago, as the report points out, people used to be discreet about cosmetic procedures; now they are "celebrated". Most of the market growth is in the area of "non-surgical" procedures – trying to make yourself look younger with Botox injections, IPL (Intense Pulsed Light) treatments and dermal fillers.

Anne, 62, who wears a fake leopardskin coat and boots, sums up her feelings about why she's here today. "We in our generation have had a great time in our teens and twenties. We don't want to give up and put the slippers on." She pauses for a moment. "It's the fight fight fight against the dying of the light," she says.

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At the Jamela stall, a cluster of middle-aged women is forming where a man is handing out free gold eye patches. The patches sit beneath your eyes, feeding the eye bags with moisture. At first it looks odd. In fact, it never stops looking odd. Linda, 53, is wearing gold patches. She has come with her husband Paul, 56. "I don't think I'm the 53 that my mum was," she says. "She was much older. These days, there are so many things you can do." She tells me her sister, who is 57, has recently had a facelift. "It cost her £7,000. She looks five years younger." But Linda is not quite ready for "work". "I'm looking at other options," she says.



Visitors try out Jamela's gold eye bag patches

Others tell me the same thing. They find themselves in their forties and fifties. But they don't want to feel middle-aged. Unlike their mothers, they say, they never stopped wanting to look young and attractive. They've tried face creams. They've tried masks. "I'm just looking," they keep telling me. What they're looking for is a midpoint. Less than a facelift but more than a cream or a mask.

One option is Thermage. "Thermage uses patented radiofrequency (RF) technology to safely heat the deeper layers of your skin", says the brochure. "Make Thermage your competitive advantage." Vicky, 45, is lying on a hospital bed, while a woman in a white coat gives her a dose of Thermage. The woman, Jane Lewis, uses a handheld device to pass an electrical current across Vicky's gel-covered face. The device, she says, sends radio waves into the skin causing inflammation. The result: more collagen, apparently. Plumper-looking skin that smoothes wrinkles. A course of

treatment costs £4,000. "It's non-invasive," says Lewis. But it looks pretty uncomfortable. Why, Vicky? "I'm just starting to notice I don't look 35 any more," she says.

Will the treatment make her look 35? It's a tough one. Skin is the most visible site of ageing.

Later, I come across another mid-range procedure that might interest Linda. It's called Theragem. Gila, who is 52 but looks much younger, is lying on a bed. Catharina Jansma, a 46-year-old Dutch woman, has set up a contraption that resembles an Anglepoise lamp, and is beaming something into Gila's head. "It's a fusion of light," says Jansma, who is wildly enthusiastic. "Incoherent polychromatic light! It penetrates 23cm into the physical body!" It is beamed through brightly-coloured crystals. "Colour therapy," says Jansma. It costs £60-£90 per hour. Gila says she's not overly worried about ageing. "But I would be lying if I said I didn't worry. It's all about maintenance."

Before I go, Jansma gives me a final pitch. Theragem, she says, is helpful for all sorts of conditions. Such as? Eczema, she says. I nod. Acne, too, she says. Also degenerative diseases such as Parkinson's. Depression. Autism. Then she shows me a picture of a woman's badly burnt leg, followed by another picture, of a normal-looking leg – the burnt leg, she says, after a course of Theragem.

I thank her.

"It's good for irritable bowel syndrome problems," she adds as I leave.

Back in the noisy marketplace, Paul Mracek, a stress coach, is giving a talk about the dangers of stress. He shows a picture of a youthful-looking Barack Obama, and another picture of the US president, looking much older and greyer, four years later. Mracek is a superb talker. He's talking about how the modern world fills us with stress. He displays a slide saying: "Senseless Thoughts Repeated Endlessly Surrounding Self." STRESS. He raises his voice to compete with the rising babble – a voice on the tannoy, music, the rattle of the flab-reducing machines.

"We've seen some things that are mind-boggling," says Louise, 45, who is here with her mum Sue, 63. She mentions the gold eye bag pouches. "It's supposed to plump up your skin by infusing collagen. And check out that machine that shakes you and burns calories. Flabbo-loss, or something, it's called."

I talk to Ian, 49, whose partner Melanie, 54, is lying on another hospital bed while a woman pumps her lips with Restylane, a dermal filler designed to make older skin look plump, and lips more pouty. Pump, pump, pump. It looks severe and painful. There's an air of tension. A crowd is gathering.

Ian slots his credit card into a machine. Money, to the tune of £198, is being pumped out of Ian's account as the Restylane is pumped into Melanie. "I don't like to watch," he says.

We talk about modern ageing. We agree it's not what it was. "I'm 49, and I live like I did as a teenager, frankly," he says.

Melanie gets off the bed. She looks a bit shaky. I ask her how old she feels.

"I would say early forties," she says.

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When I ask people why they want to look younger, they sometimes give me a quizzical look, as if I'd asked them why they would want to mend a leaking roof. Neither do they seem too concerned by horror stories about the lightly regulated non-surgical interventions sector, precisely the area where the market is booming. "It is our view that dermal fillers are a crisis waiting to happen," warned the recent government report.

Of course, you can always take it one step further and actually go under the knife. Dennis Wolf, a 42-year-old South African plastic surgeon, explains a new technique called fat transfer. You remove fat from one part of the body. That's liposuction. "Then it gets filtered," says Wolf. The filtering process is called Puregraft. Then you have "pure fat without anything else in it." Wolf then injects the pure fat back into the body, where it will be more welcome. In your facial creases, say. Better still, he does it in lots of tiny drops, so it fits seamlessly into the tissue that's already there.

Wolf looks younger than 42. Where are his wrinkles? "I've had Botox," he tells me. He's also had a hair transplant, during which follicles from the back of his head were replanted at the front. He says he uses Botox with care. "I don't like anyone to be overcooked," he says. "All my patients have natural expressions."

As the day comes to an end, people are darting around, checking out bargains. I walk past a stall that promises perfect eyesight, and a line of people with lasers aimed at their mouths in a tooth-whitening process. I also pass Durwin Banks, a 66-year-old linseed farmer, who believes in the anti-ageing properties of linseed, and who looks lonely.

I wonder if I should consider cryo lipolysis, a non-invasive procedure to freeze stubborn areas of fat, to the extent that it disappears, by way of your lymphatic system. This is performed by Dr Tracy Mountford, at the Cosmetic Skin Clinic. I'm sort of interested. It might cost around £2,000. A tooth-whitening stall puts up a sign: "Last hour. Tooth whitening kits £20. Two for £35." There is a queue for the gold eye bag patches. A sense that somewhere, just around the corner, a miracle might exist.



A tooth-whitening treatment

### The economics of beauty: why good looks mean earning power

Daniel Hamermesh, a professor at the University of Texas, has spent years studying the economics of beauty. One thing he is clear on is: "Beauty is fleeting – and youth is beauty." In surveys, "people tend to rate young adults as more attractive than older people," he says.

Hamermesh also found that "age is harsher on our perceptions of women's looks". In one set of studies, 45 per cent of women aged 18-29 were rated as "at least above average", while only 18 per cent of women aged 50-64 achieved the above-average rating. The male drop-off was smaller, from 36 per cent to 21 per cent.

Beauty, says Hamermesh, is an advantage in the workplace. Using 2010 figures, he has calculated that the average worker would earn \$1.6m in a lifetime, while a worker with below-average looks could expect to earn just \$1.46m. The penalty is harshest for below-average-looking men.

So will a facelift increase your earning power? Probably not much, says Hamermesh. That's because plastic surgery is not great at removing "the essential asymmetries" at the heart of being less than beautiful.

And if you think spending money on clothes, hair and cosmetics makes a difference, you'd be right. But it's only a small difference. What's more, he says, "the data make it clear that the extra effect of this spending diminishes the more one has already spent".

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