

Have you just started to notice the first signs of ageing, or do the bags under your eyes already need a trolley to transport them? **Jacqui Higgins** investigates your options for more youthful, sparkling eyes

Eye openers

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The delicate skin around the eyes tends to age faster than any other. Added to the fact that oil glands, sweat glands and blood supply are at a minimum in this area, the fine skin is subject to much movement, rubbing and general wear and tear. Keeping wrinkles, puffiness and sagging at bay requires consistent care and maintenance, so we've rounded up some of the most effective ways to treat and prevent eye ageing.

SURGICAL TREATMENTS

Though surgery may not be for everyone, it certainly is very effective in treating heavy, sagging lids and puffy under-eye bags. An eyelid tuck or blepharoplasty is, according to Dr Richard Halley-Stott, publicity officer for the Executive Committee of the Association of Plastic & Reconstructive Surgeons of SA (APRSSA), one of the most popular anti-ageing surgical procedures. "The operation rejuvenates your eyes, giving you a more awake, alert look by removing pockets of fat that cause bulging in the upper and lower lids. It also removes excess folds of skin."

The upper lid incision is camouflaged in the skin crease and extends into the crow's feet as required. The lower lid cut is made either just below the eyelashes (if skin removal is necessary) or inside the lid (trans-conjunctival blepharoplasty) if no skin removal is needed. Excess skin, fat and muscle is removed or repositioned as required and the wounds are closed with a pull-out suture.

A patient can have both lower and upper lids done or if preferred only one of these procedures. The trans-conjunctival blepharoplasty (the removal of fat from the lower lid) is a suitable procedure for a younger patient with a good skin but sagging lower lids.

Often done independently of other surgery, blepharoplasty can be combined with procedures such as a facelift or forehead brow lift. A forehead lift is advised when the position of the eyebrows and height of the hairline need to be adjusted. This is not, however, a suitable solution to upper eyelids unless the brow is very low.

Blepharoplasty can also be successfully combined with non-surgical treatments like Botox, in order to improve the appearance of the area, but also help with the recovery by preventing tension while the area heals.

The duration of a blepharoplasty is normally one-and-a-half hours. You need to schedule an appointment before the procedure, another approximately a week later to remove the stitches and then one or two check-ups thereafter.

Halley-Stott sites blepharoplasty as a "safe, reliable and very common procedure", which can be performed as day-case surgery under conscious sedation and local anaesthesia. Laser and/or scalpel may be used, but most surgeons opt for the precision of the latter. Discolouration around the eyes and

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some swelling is normal post surgery and you should avoid strenuous activity while recovering. In most cases, you can go back to your usual activities seven to 10 days after the surgery. Blepharoplasty costs approximately R20 000 to R35 000.

NON-SURGICAL ALTERNATIVES

Non-surgical procedures have increased and improved in leaps and bounds over the last few years, resulting in a variety of options that can stave off the ageing process. The concept today is to start with alternative rejuvenation treatments so as to avoid or postpone surgical solutions for as long as possible.

Botox

The most popular non-surgical method for treating lines around the eye area is Botox. Although not really suited to the lower eye area, it makes a massive difference to the brow area and horizontal lines at the side of the eye. Botox lifts and opens the eye, giving a fresh, relaxed look to the face. The most effective spots include between the brows, along the forehead, with a tiny amount placed just under the brow (this gives a very small lift) and just below the temples.

Dr Sally Velzeboer of Laserderm Clinic believes that with most non-surgical treatments incremental strategy is the right way to go: "Always start with less, as this allows you to decide how much is needed". Having Botox is quick (it takes 10 to 15 minutes), and is almost painless, even though it consists of several small injections strategically placed. You can expect minimal redness and slight local swelling, although this is usually barely perceptible. Having Botox on the lower eye area is not advised, as the lid can sometimes droop away from the eye and bruising is also more prevalent in this area. Some controversy comes with Botox, but according to Velzeboer it is safe, as the quantities injected are too small to have a harmful effect. Botox takes three to five days to take effect and the cost is approximately R1 300 to R1 800. The effects should remain for three to four months.

Fraxel laser

Fairly recent in the laser offering is the Fraxel laser. Unlike other CO₂ lasers that burn through layers of skin in one continuous flow, Fraxel treats the skin in tiny pockets, leaving small areas of skin untouched, resulting in minimal healing time. No more than 20 percent of the skin's surface is treated at any one session. Since these small 'burns' are microscopic and surrounded by uninjured tissue, healing is quick, with minimal risk of scarring or infection.

The results of this fractional treatment depend on the density of micro burns, the number of passes and the total number of treatments. Skin texture may improve after just one or two treatments, but fine lines, wrinkles and hyper-pigmentation



generally take four to five treatments before noticeable results can be seen. For best results, treatments should not be more than one to two weeks apart.

An anaesthetic cream is applied an hour before the treatment, and the actual laser treatment takes about 15 minutes. You can expect some puffiness and redness for 24 to 48 hours after your session. According to Velzeboer, "the fine skin around the eyes reacts very well to this treatment, and it's also highly effective in treating pigmentation."

Fraxel in the eye area costs approximately R1 000 per session.

Peels

Chemical peels are widely used because they are relatively inexpensive and can refine the skin and lessen wrinkle depth. Glycolic peels are available in varying strengths: mild peeling solutions will loosen and remove the upper part of the epidermis (*stratum corneum*) consisting of compacted dead skin cells, while stronger peels can affect the entire epidermis and even the upper dermis (deeper layers of skin). Hence, chemical peels are classified as light (superficial), medium and deep. The deeper the peel, the greater the potential for both cosmetic improvement and for side-effects.

As the eye area is delicate, using a low dose, mild peel is advised, especially in the initial stages of treatment. You can gradually increase the strength as the skin becomes more accustomed to it.

You should have a minimum of four treatments, one month apart. Expect the peel to tingle while on the skin. Reactions are variable depending on your skin type, but expect some degree of redness and peeling. Fortunately, there is usually no downtime. Sun should be avoided and sunscreen must be worn daily.

A glycolic peel will cost approximately R380 per treatment.

Carboxytherapy

Carbon dioxide, the invisible, odourless gas that is part of the air we breathe, is the basis for the latest therapy to hit our shores: Carboxytherapy. This is the infusing of CO₂ into the skin by injecting it just under the surface of the skin using a fine needle. According to information from the Skin Renewal Clinic, the body interprets the influx of CO₂ as an oxygen deficit and responds by increasing blood flow and growth factors (such as VEGF – vascular endothelial growth factor), which encourages production of new blood vessels.

The increased blood supply provides a surge of oxygen and nutrients to the treated area, improving circulation, as well as resulting in cell renewal and the stimulation of collagen production. Carboxytherapy is reputed to brighten and firm the eye contour, softening fine wrinkles and decreasing puffiness. It is also said to be particularly effective in the treatment of dark under-eye circles.

Carboxytherapy is an anti-ageing treatment, but it does not stop the ageing process – the newly stimulated cells will age naturally over time. You will need an initial consultation with a practitioner beforehand and it's important to know that this treatment option is not suitable for patients who have undergone Lasik eye surgery.

Each Carboxytherapy session around the eyes takes about 15 minutes with no downtime, though you can expect some puffiness. For best results, approximately four to six treatments are recommended, depending on the extent of the problem. Annual follow-ups are recommended.

Good to know

- Because of the delicacy and sensitivity of the eye area, always proceed with caution, regardless of the treatment.
- Fillers are not advised for application around the eye area, as the skin is very thin so fillers tend to create noticeable bumps under the skin.
- Dark circles are difficult to rectify. Often caused by poor circulation and heredity factors, there is little one can do to treat them. Models swear by haemorrhoid cream if the dark circles are caused by poor circulation. If pigmentation is to blame, try hydroquinone lightening cream, a strong 'bleaching' treatment supplied by dermatologists.
- Be gentle when touching the eye area, so no pulling, dragging or rubbing the skin. Always remove make-up with eye make-up remover to avoid causing irritation or a build-up of oils that may cause bags. Lastly, always use your ring finger (it's the gentlest) to apply eye cream.

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Bright eyes in a jar

Not ready to go under the knife or needle? Beauty editor Nicole Sparrow recommends the following eye creams.

1. First signs of ageing: Splurge on NV Perricone Cosmeceuticals Advanced Eye Area Therapy, R1 680. This product contains a pharmacopeia of ingredients from potent antioxidants to vitamins and plant extracts that will help reduce the appearance of fine lines, puffiness, dark circles and discolouration.

2. Handy two-in-one: Eyliplex-2, R395, contains an eye lift and dark circle reducer in one handy product. The day gel freshens up the eye area and helps smooth and lift lines, making wrinkles less visible. Apply the balm at night and enjoy your beauty sleep while the ingredients help the skin's natural renewal process.

3. De-puff those eyes: Solal Beauty Science Anti-Aging Eye Lift Serum, R295, contains Tetrapeptide-GHK, copper and vitamin K, all of which assist in reducing fat and water retention around the eyes and minimising dark circles. The cooling gel-cream can be used all over the eye, including the lid.

4. Dryness and loss of tone: Hyaluronic acid is a substance that occurs naturally in the skin and helps hold onto water, giving that 'cushioning' effect typical of youthful skin. When combined with Pro-Xylane, a patented L'Oréal ingredient, it boosts skin cell metabolic activity and cells are able to maintain their vitality for longer. Try L'Oréal Derma Genesis Eye Contour Cream, R169.

5. Undereye bags: According to Skin Doctors, the makers of Eyetuck, R525, the top eye concern of US women in their 50s is undereye bags and sagging. As soon as you apply Eyetuck, you'll feel a cooling, slight tightening sensation, and makers claim that used twice daily, you should see improvements in a few weeks.

6. Too many late nights: The cool silver ball not only helps Garnier Caffeine Eye Roll-On, R125, glide on smoothly, it also instantly refreshes the eye area and encourages drainage. Caffeine energises and stimulates microcirculation.

7. Bright-eyed in the city: Clarins Advanced Extra-Firming Eye Contour Serum, R495, contains an anti-pollution complex that protects against free-radical damage and environmental aggressions. The light gel texture also has an immediate lifting action that also targets puffiness and dark circles – perfect if you're in your 40s.

8. Dryness and ageing: The nourishing yet light texture of Matis Les Yeux Repairing Eye Cream, R915, soothes dryness around the eye area, helps stimulate cellular activity and assists in diminishing bags, lines and dark circles. Use twice daily for best results. ●

