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# Frown lines make way for big smiles

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## SKIN CARE

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**H**ave you ever been told that you're beautiful when you're angry?

Well, there aren't many women who would buy that line. In fact, a recent cosmetic procedure, called Botox injections, aims at wiping the frown off one's face. The procedure is performed in a dermatologist's office.

Botox, a trademarked name, is a toxin produced by a bacterium (*Clostridium botulinum*) that can cause fatal food poisoning.

In minuscule doses, however, the bacterium poses no danger to patients, said Dr. Roland Charbonneau, director of plastic surgery at the Université de Montréal. "It takes 3,000 units to kill someone, and we

use fewer than 100 units, so it's a very safe procedure," he said.

Dermatologists have been using botulinum injections to get rid of frown lines (vertical furrows between brows), crow's feet (tiny lines branching out from the sides of eyes), and worry lines (horizontal lines across forehead).

Botox compares to other treatments like collagen in that it's an injected procedure that takes minutes, gradually disappears over the course of three to six months, and smoothes out wrinkles. But Botox won't wipe out all kinds of wrinkles.

Dr. Suzanne Gagnon, a Montreal dermatologist, explained: "There

are various types of extrinsic wrinkles which have different causes underlying them. These include sun (photo aging), gravity (loss of skin elasticity due to normal aging), position (sleep or pillow lines), and muscular hyper function, which is what causes frown lines. Botox helps where the cause is muscular."

However, Charbonneau added that people shouldn't expect deep, more ingrained lines caused by frowning or worry lines to disappear. Although Botox may lessen their severity, it's meant to treat the cause and prevent further wrinkling rather than erase wrinkles.

Other cosmetic procedures, such as collagen injections and laser treatment, can treat deeper wrinkles but Gagnon added: "Their effects are shorter than expected because they don't address the underlying prob-

lem of an overactive muscle. They work better in conjunction with Botox because then you're treating both cause and effect."

What Botox does is paralyze or weaken the local muscles that one uses to frown, raise brows, or squint. This stops the constant contraction of these muscles, which eventually may create permanent lines or wrinkles.

The toxin attaches itself to the muscle where it's injected and "prevents the transmission of a message from the nerve fibres to the muscle," Charbonneau explained.

Suzanne Cardinal, 43, a Montreal fashion stylist who has undergone three treatments with Botox, said that she was plagued by an involuntary frowning action.

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# Injection 'felt like a mosquito bite'

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"I had a really bad habit of frowning, and everyone would always ask me, 'Are you mad?' And yet I was in a good mood and everything was fine."

Cardinal says she was thrilled to discover that Botox could help her. "It felt like a mosquito bite, took five minutes, and two days later, I looked in the mirror and I was so happy I wasn't angry-looking any more," she said. Botox actually works gradually, so it may take three to four days before the muscle stops being able to contract.

Previously, she said, the only option available to prevent frowning would have been to undergo a surgical procedure to disarm the muscles.

Gagnon said she herself has undergone Botox injections, performed by her sister, Dr. Madeleine Gagnon. "I think if it's good enough for my patients, then it's fine for me too."

She and her sister have been performing Botox injections since 1996. Actually, Botox has been around in medical circles for much longer than it has been touted as a wrinkle-removing procedure. Launched in 1980 for medical purposes, Botox's other uses include treating facial tics, muscle spasms, and eye conditions such as strabismus (cross-eye) and blepharospasm (uncontrolled eye-blinking).

Any ill effects of the Botox procedure usually disappear within three weeks. "Side-effects include the possibility in older people that the brow may droop a bit from forehead injec-

tions. If injections are too close to the eye, you may also have a droopy lid. Slight bruising, lasting a few days, is also possible in the crow's-feet area if the needle touches a blood vessel there," Gagnon said.

She added that Botox contains traces of albumin, a protein also found in eggs, so people who are allergic to eggs shouldn't undergo the treatment.

Botox results last three to six months on average but, Gagnon said, "The response is very individual, much like people's reaction to medication can differ. So some people may have more brief results or (effects) extending beyond six months." The treatments, which cost about \$300 to \$500 and can be performed in a dermatologist's office, have a cumulative effect so that each subsequent treatment lasts longer.