

I Put Electricity in My Face to Stop Wrinkles

By Rebecca Harrington



This week, the Cut explores women's complicated relationship to beauty standards and the effort required to meet them.

When I was 24, I had a very important meeting with my dermatologist. Midway through my mole exam, she suggested I inject Botox all over my face. She said that if I started now, I wouldn't age. I would just turn my face into this cool mask that looked like my face but was somehow not like it at all.

I left the dermatologist's office pretty convinced that this was a great idea. Sadly, I dithered. Botox seemed expensive. Years went by and I still didn't have enough money for Botox. I kept taking taxis. Why? They are not even faster.

Luckily for me, the beauty industry has invented a new technology to stave off the dread and existential horror caused by female old age. The newest fad in high-end home beauty involves pulsing electrical currents into your face with a handheld device you charge in your bathroom. This purportedly stops you from getting wrinkles and is less expensive and less painful than Botox. I might as well try it, even though what I really want is the serene, slightly swollen lack of emotionality that comes from injecting botulism in your forehead.

Preparation

I procure three different devices for my experiment: the NuFACE, the CACI Microlift, and the StriVectin Labs Facial Toner. I will try them out for a week and see which one works the best. I have always believed in the healing power of electricity. Instead of a key connected to a kite, I will use my face to harness electricity's healing powers.

The CACI Microlift:

The CACI Microlift claims to “firm your jaw line, plump the cheek area,” and “relax facial muscles,” which is everything I want in an anti-aging electrical wand. The only problem with the CACI is that it’s not approved by the FDA in the U.S. (Congress!!! Why?). Luckily, NYC celebrity facialist Georgia Louise of the Georgia Louise Salon (Emma Stone is a client) kindly let me borrow hers.

The CACI looks a bit like an electric toothbrush, but instead of a brush head, it has four “electro buds” filled with a “serum.” The buds conduct electricity onto your face. You can also choose from two modes: One is for “toning,” and one is for “wrinkles.” I do both.

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On my first day of the experiment, I take the CACI out of its case and insert the serum-filled electro buds to start “toning” my face. “Toning your face” is a bit like performing noninvasive surgery using only calipers to accomplish your dubious aims. Essentially, you grasp the fleshy parts of your face with the CACI and hold your skin between two electro-conductors, in the style of Dr. Frankenstein. I can feel the electricity pulsing through my skin, and it hurts in a mild way, as if I had put my hand over a lightbulb. At one point, I feel like I’m going to faint and need to sit down. But I need to faint all the time and do not blame this on the CACI.

Next I do the wrinkles program, which requires moving all four of the tongs rapidly over every place you could possibly get wrinkles (your whole face). You do this for several minutes. This feels a bit like running over a carpet in stocking feet. I experience shocks here, but they are mostly thrilling, just as I imagine they were for Dr. Frankenstein. It does slightly hurt on the thin and vulnerable skin of my forehead. (Yet that is also where most of my wrinkles are — is it working?)

My face does seem slightly tighter or something, but I can definitely still move it. (Bad.) Georgia Louise also gave me a rose-quartz face massager, and that seems to be working, too, in some weird way. My skin seems to be adhering more to my bones.

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The NuFACE has many different attachments. There is one with tiny prongs that is supposed to help eye wrinkles, and another that emits a red-hot beam in order to erase wrinkles with a combination of “red, amber, and infrared light.” This one is sort of calming and actually seems to completely erase my forehead wrinkle in one 20-minute session performed while watching a particularly riveting episode of *Law & Order*. It comes back, though.

After a week of use I don’t have a “nu face,” necessarily, but I do have slightly firmer skin, and my forehead wrinkle keeps appearing and then disappearing without warning.

StriVectin Labs Facial Toner

This device differs most from the CACI and the NuFACE. Instead of a wand that delivers electrical stimulation to muscles, the StriVectin is structured like a defibrillator attached to a headband. You put the headband on so that it sits on the back of your head. Then two gel pads sit on your cheeks and jaw and an electrical current flows into those areas. You can't move the device around your face and get a full nu face or anything. You just have to let it sit there and hope it works.

I am going to be honest: This was one of the more uncomfortable experiences of my entire life. Even at a low intensity I could feel the electricity pumping into my jaw, probably giving me TMJ. It was like standing on a vibrating board and having your teeth rattle constantly. I could barely stand 2 minutes, much less 20. After one session, I resolved to stop. Nothing changed on my face, and my eye kept blinking.

Conclusion:

After the end of this experiment, I would say that CACI is probably the most precise electronic facial wand on the market (I like the two modes), but the NuFACE is certainly not bad if FDA approval is important to you. The StriVectin is good if you like TMJ.

But do any of these devices work? Can you get a nu face with electricity?

Cosmetic dermatologist Dr. Paul Jarrod Frank says no. "There is no science or literature that suggests that strengthening facial muscles (that are very different than weight-bearing skeletal muscles like biceps) helps with aging at all." He postulates that any results you might see would just be the devices "making the skin appear a bit swollen." Luckily, the risks are "minimal to none," so at least my worries are unfounded.

I think I will keep electronically manipulating my face. I have the devices. And who knows — they may be working? In the meantime, I will take one fewer cab per week to save for Botox and, until then, buy a mask for my face to hide its eventual decay.