

# A FACELIFT, THE NATURAL WAY

*For some, acupuncture is a natural alternative to Botox for wrinkle reduction*

By Donna Kutt Nahas

At 50, Catherine Vitale began to notice the effects of age and gravity. With crow's feet and forehead creases failing to fade after a good night's rest, the freelance photographer booked an appointment with a dermatologist for Botox injections.

At first, she was thrilled with the result—no wrinkles; but friends and family members thought otherwise. “They said I was kind of expressionless,” recalls Vitale, now 55. “My eyebrows were pulled up, and my eyes looked different.”

## YOUTHFUL GLOW

She had heard that an acupuncture “facelift,” or facial acupuncture, was a natural, nonchemical and virtually painless alternative to revitalize her appearance and minimize the signs of aging. Results were visible, she says, after her first treatment. “My face looked lifted, and it had a glow to it; even my eyelids looked lifted,” says Vitale, of Amagansett.

“People no longer want a tight, unexpressive appearance,” says Shellie Goldstein, a licensed acupuncturist and director of Shellie Goldstein Associates of Manhattan and Easthampton. “We are coming into a culture where natural is better.”

## FACE-BODY CONNECTION

Acupuncture (including an acupuncture facelift) is based on the belief that energy, or qi (pronounced “chee”), flows through the body's pathways, or meridians. An imbalance in the meridians is thought to cause disease or weakness in an internal organ. By inserting needles in the skin at points on the face and body, advocates say, balance and energy are restored, facial muscles are toned and lifted, and wrinkles are softened.



Acupuncturists believe good health is reflected in the outward appearance. For example, sagging facial skin is thought to be caused by weakness in the spleen, explains Dr. Ping Zhang, a licensed acupuncturist and doctor of Oriental medicine in Port Washington.

Dr. Bruce Katz, director of JUVA Skin & Laser Center and MediSpa in Manhattan and a spokesman for the American Academy of Dermatology, agrees that an acupuncture facelift tones muscles and can rejuvenate lifeless skin but stops short of saying that it has anti-aging benefits. “There have been no studies, to my knowledge, to show that it takes away fine lines and wrinkles,” he says.

Adherents recommend a series of about 10 weekly treatments followed by monthly maintenance. Treatment sessions are roughly 45 minutes and cost about \$150. Side effects could include mild bruising at the needle site. Before proceeding, ask a physician whether treatment is right for you. Acupuncture is not advised during pregnancy or for those who take blood thinners or have heart disease or hemophilia.

## FINDING AN ACUPUNCTURIST

Experts say to make sure the acupuncturist is licensed and has taken courses in facial acupuncture certified by the National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine or other state acupuncture boards.

Says Vitale, “Facial acupuncture is better than Botox. You come out looking better, and it holds.”*LL*

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