

“Woman’s own”

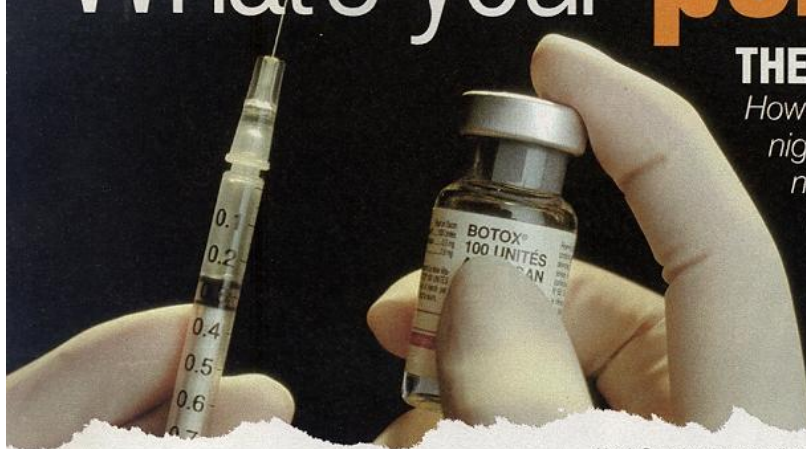
DECEMBER, 3, 2001

What's your **poison?**

THE BOTOX REPORT

How would you like a girlie night out and wake up the next morning minus your wrinkles? Well, now you can. The hottest invites around at the moment are for 'Botox parties'

by Kim O'Mahoney



At first glance, the five attractive women sipping champagne in a softly lit room could be guests at a pal's make-up party. But, despite the giggles, this is no ordinary girl's night out and the women involved aren't discussing foundations and blushers.

They're taking looking good one step further by having a shot of Botox, the new wonder treatment that promises to erase lines and creases from even the most stressed faces.

Cosmetic surgery is a boom industry with just about everything catered for, from brow lifts to boob jobs. A staggering 4,000 British women every month are having Botox injections in a bid to hold back the years. Now plastic surgeon Mr A Jeya Prakash has tapped into the market, playing host to the best party in town.

'I'd noticed how women often turned up for treatments with a friend,' he explains. 'It made sense really, having someone to chat to while you're waiting and a bit of moral support. This is just a progression of that.'

For Yvonne Hamilton and her friends, it certainly seems a winning formula. Chilled champagne, dainty canapés, pretty flower arrangements and low lighting make the whole process fun and relaxing. Since Mr Prakash introduced these elements into his elegant London practice, his waiting list now rivals that of any celebrity hairdresser.

On party days he treats as many as 35 women and, although his waiting

room is bursting at the seams and the laughter is, at times, raucous, Mr Prakash manages to remain calm and professional throughout.

Upon arrival you're whisked upstairs to a room which resembles a plush hotel suite more than a medical surgery. Sipping bubbly on the big, comfortable, squashy sofas, it's easy to forget why you're actually there.

The only reminder is Lucy, assistant to Mr Prakash, who, in her formal and efficient-looking blue surgical uniform, carefully pours the drinks clutching a bottle in one hand and firmly gripping a clipboard in the other.

The atmosphere is relaxed and, as the giggling gets louder, it would not seem out of place for a Chippendale to suddenly appear.

'I never thought I would do anything like this,' says Pilates instructor Sandie Wilson, 37, from London. 'Lots of my friends have had Botox injections and recommended it so I decided to give it a go. The first time I was really nervous but the informal party atmosphere totally relaxes you.'

Sandie, who has many celebrity clients, reckons the Botox jabs have given her a confidence boost. 'The way I see it, I look after my body, so why not my face?' she explains.

Yvonne Hamilton, who bears a striking resemblance to Noel Gallagher's ex-wife, Meg Mathews, agrees. The 35-year-old mother of two swears by her facial 'fix'. 'It's fantastic and the great

thing is Botox knocks years off you without being too obvious. I didn't tell my partner the first time I had it done. But after about a month we had a big night out, I got sloshed and revealed all!'

For Clare Bassi, a 28-year-old from Essex who works in promotions, this is her second treatment. 'One day I was looking at a photograph of myself and noticed I had really bad frown lines, caused by my love of sunbathing,' she says. 'Botox is fantastic and worth every penny.'

While the girls enjoy a laugh, Lucy starts applying anaesthetic cream around their eyes and forehead.

'It's not a local anaesthetic but it takes the edge off any pain from the needle,' she explains.

At this point, 36-year-old Sara Brown from Cheshire starts to look nervous. She's a Botox virgin and she doesn't like injections but she's determined to get rid of the wrinkles on her forehead. 'You'll be fine,' the others assure her.

'Mr Prakash is wonderful. He did my boobs for me a few years ago,' Yvonne chips in encouragingly.

Indeed, Mr Prakash is hailed as a bit of a miracle worker by the women who flock to his surgery.

When Yvonne's turn comes round she has a quick recap with the surgeon before hopping onto his examination table.

'We are treating expression lines which are created by muscle activity,' he explains to Yvonne. He then asks her to frown while he injects the

furrows between her eyebrows, turning the needle in different directions underneath the skin.

She's then asked to smile while he injects her crow's-feet and finally to raise her eyebrows while he works on her forehead. It's all over in minutes and Yvonne confirms it's painless.

She presses an ice pack to her face to prevent any swelling and heads back upstairs to the comfort of the sofa and her mates.

The results are not immediate or permanent. As a rule, changes are noticed the following day and most wrinkles have miraculously vanished within three, revealing a new, line-free version of your former self for about three to four months, after which it's time to party all over again.

But there is a flip side to this wonder treatment because Botox is, in fact, a strain of the poison which causes botulism which paralyses the muscles treated making it impossible to frown. If administered incorrectly it can cause serious problems. Even if everything goes well, you are still injecting toxins into your body.

Mr Prakash says it's important to be treated by a qualified, recommended professional. 'It is vital to inject the correct amount of solution to avoid drooping,' he stresses. 'It can be used as a preventative to wrinkles if caught early enough and it is then possible to look the same age for years.' His youngest Botox patient is just 20 years old.

Suzanne Howell, a psychic from Hertfordshire, is one of Mr Prakash's

Botox – the facts

- Botox is by far the most popular brand of the purified naturally occurring poison, Botulinum toxin type A.
- Botulinum, before it was isolated and harnessed by medicine, was known as a substance that even in the tiniest quantities caused chronic food poisoning.
- Botox is described as a wrinkle eraser because it literally rubs them out by freezing the muscles involved.
- The treatment is fast, uncomplicated and affordable for many. But you should never try Botox at a party where you can't check the clinic's credentials or hygiene.

regulars. At 53, she could quite easily pass for someone in her early 40s, though she admits to having had a face-lift eight years ago.

'As a psychic I do concentrate very hard all day when I am working,' she says. 'I wasn't aware of it but I was frowning a lot and thought that I may need a second face-lift.' But she discovered Botox instead and claims the results are far better than surgery – and much cheaper too.

Before any injections can be given, it's necessary to have a consultation with Mr Prakash, which costs £60. Thereafter, the treatments are £250 per session – which covers crow's-feet as well as brow lines. However, on party days Botox is offered at the bargain rate of £150 per session. With free drinks and nibbles thrown in, it's no wonder they're so successful.

And in this informal atmosphere new friends are made. Mobile phones are vibrating and ringing all over the room but the girls aren't answering.

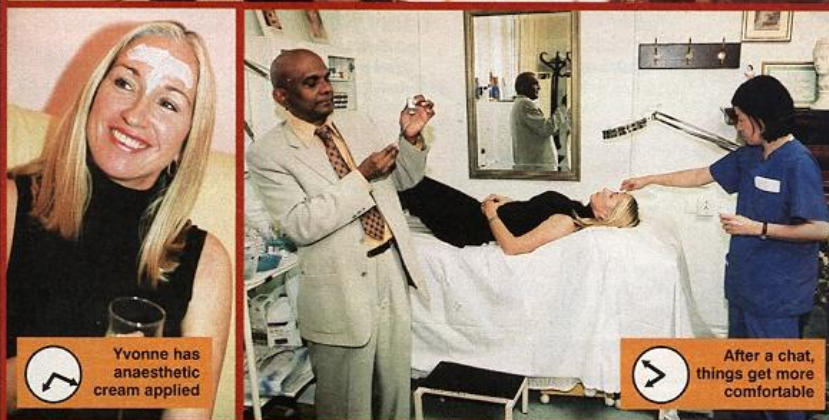
'Oh God, it might be my husband,' says a blonde who doesn't want to be named. 'I'm 16 years older than him,' reveals the former model. 'Only this morning I discovered he might be having an affair.' Everyone makes comforting noises and offers varying and – often conflicting – advice.

'Oh no,' groans Clare as she returns to the room clutching her diary. 'Lucy says there are no available party bookings now until April.' A wave of panic passes through the room before the momentary silence is broken by the loud pop of a champagne cork.

● For more information, contact Mr A Jeya Prakash on 020 7224 1622



Party time with nibbles and champagne



Yvonne has anaesthetic cream applied

After a chat, things get more comfortable



The injection stage takes around five minutes to complete

Yvonne's ready to go five minutes later