

The Truth About Fighting Wrinkles With Facial Exercises

Better than Botox? Not so fast.



You may have heard about the concept of “exercising” your face at some point. Brands like FaceXercise and Face Yoga promise facial exercises that reduce the appearance of fine lines and wrinkles without Botox, and each has its own celebrity following. But does a facial workout actually do anything good for you?

“Staying physically fit keeps you looking and feeling young, yet up until now facial fitness has remained the missed opportunity for us to achieve the same anti-aging goals we continue to search for in a new bottle of cream or the invasive array of injections or laser procedures,” FaceXercise founder Thuyen Nguyen says on his website. He offers clients a facial massage of sorts, coupled with cupping therapy to increase circulation.

Gary Goldenberg, M.D., medical director of the Dermatology Faculty Practice at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, tells SELF you should take a pass on this trend. “This is a terrible idea and will only cause wrinkles,” he says. Here’s why: Repetitive muscle contractions cause your skin to wrinkle (think:

the two lines that show up on your forehead from furrowing your brow or crows feet from narrowing your eyes). Regularly giving your facial muscles a “workout” will only speed up the process, increasing the chances you’ll get wrinkles sooner.

Goldenberg says you might see temporary results from facial workouts if your muscles hypertrophy (i.e. they get bigger, stretching out your skin), but he points out that the results won’t last. “This effect is temporary and will only produce more wrinkles and make wrinkles you already have worse,” he says.

But New York City dermatologist Doris Day, M.D., author of the upcoming book *Skinfluence*, tells SELF that there are some facial exercises you can do that will help—you just have to be smart about the ones you choose.

Your muscles are attached to your skin and pull it in different directions, she explains. “As people age, they have very bad facial posture—they tend to furrow brows, purse lips, and kind of implode on themselves,” she says. As a result, you strengthen muscles that pull your face inward and end up losing control over the muscles that can pull your face upward.

To strengthen those upward facial muscles—which can basically give you a facelift—she recommends doing a facial movement when where you look like you’re going to laugh or smile, but don’t actually do it. That raises your eyebrows slightly and even impacts the muscles around your ears, strengthening them and pulling the skin over them back, Day says. As a result, you strengthen the muscles that pull your face up and weaken the ones that pull it down, which can visibly age you.

Jeremy Green, M.D., a Miami-based cosmetic dermatologist tells SELF that facial exercises might stimulate collagen production, but says it hasn’t been studied. But he also cautions against exercises like frowning, smiling, or clenching your teeth repeatedly. “Wrinkles form in the skin due to repetitive muscle contraction underneath the skin,” he says.

Day also recommends finding your most relaxed expression and striving to wear that throughout the day instead of your regular resting face, which may involve a wrinkle-promoting furrowed brow and pursed lips. To find this expression, take a few deep breaths to relax and look at yourself in front of the mirror—this is your best resting face, she says. Over time and with practice, this can become as innate as standing up straight, she says.

Dermatologist Nazanin Saedi, M.D., says this can be key since the best thing you can do to prevent wrinkles is to move your face as little as possible. “I have patients in their 40s that have been trained not to use their forehead muscles and as a result, they don’t develop wrinkles in their foreheads,” she says.

Of course, there are several scientifically proven ways to decrease wrinkle formation. Goldenberg cites wearing sunscreen regularly, since UV rays cause skin damage and thin collagen, as well as using a daily moisturizer to nourish your skin. He also recommends injectibles like Botox that work to decrease facial muscle movements and prevent and reduce wrinkles. And, once wrinkles form, they can be smoothed out with laser procedures, such as Fraxel, and micro-needling with platelet rich plasma.

So, while paying for someone to give you a facial workout sounds cool in theory, it’s probably best to just save your money.