

# So, will sticking 35 needles in your face really have any benefit? Let's see...

**W**hoever would have thought it's possible to feel relaxed enough to fall asleep when you've got 35 tiny needles embedded in your face?

Certainly not me.

In fact, as I drive to cosmetic acupuncturist Melissa Day's treatment room on Ipswich Waterfront to allow her to insert those fine, orange-tipped needles around my cheeks, eyes, nose and mouth, I feel strangely nervous.

I've never had any kind of acupuncture before, probably precisely because I'm not a fan of needles. I have to sit down for fear of fainting if I so much as think of a needle-wielding medic coming anywhere near me.

This is probably not the best line of thought



Cosmetic acupuncturist Melissa Day.

Picture: CONTRIBUTED

Reports from America say people are getting addicted to Botox. **Sheena Grant** finds out about a natural, holistic alternative that benefits health too...



to be pursuing immediately before my acupuncture session and it's not long before I pluck up the courage to ask Melissa if it will hurt. She reassures me it won't. I might feel a little discomfort as the super-fine needles go in but the trick is to breathe into it and it will soon pass.

And anyway, if there is any discomfort it indicates the needle is at a point where there's some energy imbalance to clear. So it's a positive thing.

Melissa, who grew up in Diss, has been doing cosmetic acupuncture for the last three years and has developed her own, unique take on the procedure, which she calls Niroshini Cosmetic Acupuncture.

The idea is that as well as providing a non-surgical facelift it's a holistic treatment, addressing other areas of health and wellbeing and treating skin conditions, such as muscle tone and acne.

So much so that Melissa goes through a thorough medical questionnaire with clients beforehand, looking at any areas the acupuncture might be able to address. She also does an eye reading with me and identifies a few digestion and sleep issues to focus on.

Cosmetic acupuncture is becoming increasingly popular as a natural alternative to Botox and even facelifts. Celebrities such as Angelina Jolie, Jennifer Aniston, Gwyneth Paltrow and Madonna are said to be fans.

I've come to give the treatment a try after new publicity about Botox and a study that found some people - men as well as women - are

becoming addicted to the treatment, in which a form of the botulism bacterium, the world's most lethal neurotoxic agent, is injected to stop nerves communicating with facial muscles, smoothing and softening wrinkles for around four to six months.

The trouble is, says Dana Berkowitz, author of a book called *Botox Nation: Changing the Face of America*, that when the effects wear off people head back for more. Women in their 20s are even having the injections, believing they can prevent wrinkles appearing in the first place. In the UK, a 2011 survey showed Botox accounted for 39% of non-surgical treatments carried out.

"Women I interviewed talked about it in terms of it being addictive," Prof Berkowitz has been quoted as saying. "One said she was 'crack-like' about it."

Therapists like Melissa want people to realise there is a healthy, natural alternative that costs roughly the same as a comparable Botox treatment but has none of the side effects, which can include headaches, blurred vision and drooping eyelids, and other health concerns.

"Botox is a toxin and we don't know if it will have any long-term effects on people's health," says Melissa. "Acupuncture, on the other hand, has been around for centuries and stimulates the body to heal itself naturally. This is enhancing rather than changing you. A lot of people want something more natural."

"Unlike Botox, which abates in to the system, the cosmetic acupuncture treatment works in the days following the treatment as it stimulates facial muscles and collagen production. I have even had clients who have previously had cosmetic surgery but have been more satisfied with the results and long-lasting effects of



Gwyneth looks great. Could this be partly why? Picture: IAN WEST /PA PHOTOS.

the cosmetic acupuncture. And cosmetic surgery is far more costly."

Before we begin, Melissa explains that she will insert needles at specific facial points to stimulate different muscle groups. Some will be for health and others will be cosmetic, which involves a slightly different angling of the needle.

"I've developed my own method of working because I think it's important to treat the health side as well," she says. "I believe if you're feeling well on the inside it's going to show on the outside. It's a holistic experience that involves massage and other techniques as well."

Melissa is also a reiki therapist and uses that in the treatment too. Her clients cover a wide age range

but she has a personal rule she won't give anyone under 26 cosmetic acupuncture. And she gives herself the treatment too, for 'fine lines' on her forehead.

"There's no set number of treatments that a person will need," she tells me. "Some need a course of 10 and then a top-up session every six months to a year, others might see results in two to three sessions. It's unique to the individual - each time you will see a difference. People who have Botox tend to want a quick answer. This is progressive but the results are better, I think. It stimulates the muscles so the face can do the work itself."

By now I'm lying on a treatment couch with soothing background music, preparing for the first needle.

I close my eyes and Melissa tells me to breathe in before I feel a slight jab - but no pain. As the needle 'settles' there's a slight tingling, warming sensation that's not unpleasant. This procedure is repeated 34 times. Only the needles in my eyebrow area are slightly uncomfortable. Melissa tells me this correlates to my digestive area and indicates an energy imbalance that the acupuncture will address.

I peek out from under my eyelashes and can see the needle ends rising from my face. I feel like a pin cushion.

Melissa then tells me to relax and leaves the room for a few minutes. When she comes back, I'm asleep.

Once I've come round she removes the needles, applying arnica gel in case of bruising (of which there is none) and giving me a relaxing arm, shoulder and neck massage.



Above, Sheena Grant before, during and after her cosmetic acupuncture treatment, Left, Jennifer Aniston is said to be a fan of cosmetic acupuncture.

Picture: CONTRIBUTED /PA

Afterwards I feel less tense and more relaxed than I've felt for a long time. I'm not sure any wrinkles are smoothed but my skin definitely looks brighter and more luminous. I need to avoid tea and coffee for 72 hours as my body will be detoxing, Melissa tells me.

That night, I sleep well and it may be my imagination but my skin seems to look healthier in the morning.

I enjoyed the treatment so much it's the sort of thing I could get addicted to. But perhaps that would be no bad thing. Not as bad as being addicted to Botox anyway.

**For more information, visit [www.niroshini-acupuncture.com](http://www.niroshini-acupuncture.com) or call 01473 430026. Melissa also travels across East Anglia for clients.**

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