

by Kate Spicer

HERE I am, standing in front of a cosmetic surgeon who is scrawling over my face with an eye pencil. He is marking the areas that he thinks are problematic, and rattling off the procedures that will ensure I don't need a full facelift.

Among them are fat transfers — where fat cells are taken from another part of the body and injected into the face under a local anaesthetic — and 'micro suction', the small-needle equivalent of liposuction, which will 'clean up my jawline and remove this early double chin'.

My face has already lost its plumping collagen and stretchy elastin, I'm told.

Swipe, swipe, the pencil dashes across each cheek. 'A fat transfer into the cheekbone area will make cheekbones higher and lift some of the skin,' he tells me. I'm only 46. I hadn't anticipated considering anything cosmetic until it really had all gone south in my 60s.

But, according to one of the world's leading cosmetic surgeons, that's where we're all going wrong.

Dr Gerald Imber says every woman has a period of adult life when she looks her youthful, healthy best — he calls this the 'Youth Corridor' and claims that, by following the anti-ageing advice in his book of the same name, you can extend that corridor of youth by many decades.

'If someone approaches anti-ageing properly, a person in their 30s can look essentially the same for around the next 30 years,' says Dr Imber. 'There is no reason why a 60-year-old can't be the hottest-looking woman in the room.'

Dr Imber is the self-styled king of unobtrusive refresher procedures — regular, tiny fixes that hold back the years in relatively subtle ways. He'll blast your wrinkles, restore a sagging jawline. Instead of a full facelift at 60, he advocates less invasive procedures performed throughout your 30s, 40s and 50s, to help women (and men) age more gracefully.

But his approach requires a lifelong commitment. First, there are preventative measures we should all be following — not smoking; maintaining a steady weight; avoiding the sun; using the right skincare; and drinking green tea by the gallon for its antioxidants.

'When a woman hits her 50s, you can tell the people who took all the self-help measures,' he says. 'They will not be wrinkled. There are two types of mature skin — there is the roadmap of wrinkles, and there is saggy skin. Saggy skin can be completely rejuvenated by a good surgeon. Wrinkles? They're for ever: you can't do anything.'

If women follow a good skincare regime and make small changes early, he says, they will never need a full facelift.

CONTROVERSIALLY, his view of youthfulness isn't all about self-help. He also recommends clinical treatments, such as Botox, acid peels and dermal fillers, that are known as 'non-invasive'. To my surprise, Dr Imber recommends Botox in your late 20s.

It's not about age; it's about the mirror. Look at pictures of your mother and grandmother. If, congenitally, you have bags under your eyes, no cream will help. If you look tired even when you're not, do something about it. When you are young, the skin is elastic and will shrink back. If you wait until your 50s, it won't.

'We need to stop thinking surgical intervention happens in your 60s. Surgery is best done when your skin can accommodate it. I am not talking about major facelifts, but a little intervention.'

He believes that, if you're in your late 20s and notice lines running from the nose to the mouth, you should 'fill them, as soon as you see them. Either with temporary dermal fillers or with your own fat once or twice and you'll never need to do it again'.

His approach is controversial and other surgeons, such as Norman Waterhouse, former president of the British Association of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons (BAAPS), are sceptical.

'[Dr Imber] is right in saying we should invest in our faces early and have a long-term programme, rather than waiting for a facelift in later life,' says Mr Waterhouse. 'But there are flaws in his theories.' For

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by a nun at Washington University in 1965

Life & Style

The doctor who says anyone can look like this when they're 60

You won't need a facelift. Just a LOT of dedication!



instance, Mr Waterhouse strongly disagrees with fat transfers in your 20s. He says: 'Fillers too early can be a disaster. It's like a bike tyre — each time you inflate the skin, it gets a little weaker. The overuse of filler by this generation is going to cause big problems.'

Yet Dr Imber's fans are legion. While the man himself is tight-lipped about exactly who he treats in his Manhattan practice, his clientele is said to include celebrities and socialites who are fans of his conservative and discreet work.

'I would be embarrassed to make someone look like a caricature,' he says. 'I do women who work, not women who lunch. CEOs, professionals, lawyers, teachers...'

And 30 per cent of his patients are men. 'I have taken care of politicians in every administration for the past 25 years. I leave them looking normal. No one knows anything was done.'

'The reality is, if two people apply for a job, the one that looks better gets the apple.' Statistically, he may be right. Employment levels are 8 per cent lower for women aged 50 to 59 than the national average of 75 per cent.

It may be mid-life anxiety but, for several years, I have felt a creeping obsolescence, so I've started dabbling irregularly in the dark arts of Botox and dermal fillers.

These sorts of treatments, along with lasers and acid peels, belong in the non-surgical maintenance aspect of Dr Imber's programme, though, for me, they've not always been entirely successful. Fillers in my lips resulted in an unenviable

trout pout and, after another doctor gave me injections to look 'fresher', I had headaches for weeks. 'That's too much Botox,' says Dr Imber. 'Less is always more.'

He estimates my face requires approximately £15,000 of work if I want to stroll down the Youth Corridor into my 60s. In time, I will, he says, be a good candidate for his limited incision facelift technique (LIPT). This is a far less invasive version of the traditional facelift, which pretty much removes the face and redrapes it, but it is a facelift nonetheless.

And if I don't make it down the Youth Corridor? I imagine a room of ugly, discarded old people. 'If you feel young and vital, but don't look it, no one gives you the chance,' says Dr Imber. 'You don't have to like it, but it's a fact.'

DR IMBER'S ANTI-AGEING TIPS

CHILDHOOD
EVERY mother should make sure her child is smothered in sunscreen. 'The most damaging sun is that had in the years up to 18,' warns Dr Imber.

TEENS
CONTINUE to use sunscreen and learn a good skincare regime.

'Teens should cleanse daily with a mild soap such as Dove, or a suitable cleanser. Teach the importance of exfoliation using a flannel in

an upward motion.' He adds that products containing benzoyl peroxide and beta hydroxy acids are the only 'worthwhile' acne treatments.

Never smoke. Eat sensibly. 'Don't get too thin as you will lose normal subcutaneous fat,' says Dr Imber.

He also stresses the importance of maintaining a stable weight through life as the skin can't take the inflation and deflation of yo-yo dieting.

EARLY TWENTIES

DR IMBER is evangelical about using antioxidant serum containing vitamin C from your early 20s. This, he says, stops the deterioration in skin caused by oxidation — a similar chemical effect to how metal might rust on exposure to air.

Vitamin C, he believes, is the healthiest thing for the skin. 'Add melatonin and vitamin E, and its potency as an antioxidant increases exponentially,' he says.

He, unsurprisingly, recommends his Ultimate Antioxidant Vitamin C Boost Serum (£200, harrods.com). Cheaper options are Vitamin C Skin Reviver (£18, TheBodyShop.com) and Super Facialist Vitamin C+ Glow Boost Skin Serum (£16.99, Boots).

Again, exfoliation is key. If dead layers aren't removed, this inhibits the skin's ability to renew itself. Alpha hydroxy acids (AHAs) work as an exfoliator because the acid reacts with the upper layer of the epidermis, weakening dead skin cells and encouraging new ones.

Beta hydroxy acids (BHAs) meanwhile, can fully dissolve in oil and penetrate into pores, so these

work better for oily skin or acne. Salicylic acid is the most common form of BHA in skincare.

LATE TWENTIES

'IT'S time to stop jogging, as the high-level pounding pulls the facial skin away from the underlying muscles and bones.'

Deal with any trouble spots as they occur and 'you may never need anything more than minor non-invasive procedures to keep looking your best'. Also, use a mild, foaming cleanser to remove make-up, rinse twice, then use a towel to gently dry in an upwards motion, as this exfoliates the skin.

THIRTIES

AS WELL as all of the above, start using eye cream. Dr Imber also believes the early use of Botox can prevent the first tiny lines forming.

Ensure you eat a healthy diet, including carbs. 'I don't buy any of that Atkins diet nonsense,' he says. Include healthy fats 'such as olive oil and those in coldwater fish'. Surprisingly, alcohol restriction does not appear in the Youth Corridor. 'A daily glass or two of wine doesn't hurt anybody' — though Dr Imber adds: 'Excessive drinking (more than two glasses a day) can cause puffiness around the eyes.'

FORTIES

ACCORDING to Dr Imber, in this decade, regular facial peels and Botox are inescapable. Smile or

laugh lines will deepen and require fillers or a fat transfer, and it may be time to remove fat from the eye and jaw area. 'Gravity has started to pull everything down,' he says.

Tretinoin (a prescription-strength derivative of vitamin A, also known as Retin-A, which increases the rate of cell turnover) or AHAs can be used on trouble spots, such as under-eye wrinkles and smile lines. Dr Imber stresses pigment spots should be removed professionally.

FIFTIES

'BY NOW there's a loss of facial volume — add fillers along the cheek area,' says Dr Imber. 'You've already invested in good skincare, but this is the point when everyone needs professional skincare peels.'

Every night, after removing make-up, follow with a skin brightener, such as Ibuki Refining Moisturiser (£42, Jelutonique.com), to revive skin and equalise pigment.

SIXTY AND BEYOND

SKIN has loosened so, even if you have avoided the sun, you will have lost elasticity.

Wrinkled skin should respond to antioxidants in creams and laser resurfacing, but 'if you've followed my rules — avoiding the sun, not smoking, running and yo-yo dieting — you will be far less wrinkled.'

■ THE Youth Corridor range by Dr Gerald Imber is available exclusively at Harrods

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