

Cosmetic procedure can reveal the youth within

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Out, out, damned age spot.

Begone satanic sags, fleshy jowls and jiggly wattles.

If there's one thing baby boomers hate to see when we look in the mirror it's a face (or body) that does not match our inner image of ourselves.

Though the quest for eternal youth hardly began with the storied generation of babies born between 1946 and 1964 — Ponce de Leon was searching for a fountain of it in 1513 — boomers are behind the recent comeback of face-lifts, according to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons.

"They're healthy, they want to look as good as they feel, and there's lots of them," says Dr. Richard D'Amico, ASPS president and chief of the department of plastic surgery at Englewood Hospital.

"There has been a misconception that these less invasive procedures [Botox, Restylane, Juvederm and light-based treatments], if you just did enough of it, would actually be a substitute for the facial rejuvenation surgery," D'Amico, 57, says. "People have realized that while Botox may be a great thing for a 30-year-old actress with forehead frowns, it isn't going to correct jowls in the face that are the size of Kansas.

"This year's statistics show that face-lifts in both men and women are up 15 percent — that's a major swing back in the other direction," he says.

Hackensack plastic surgeon William K. Boss Jr. is well aware that "non-invasive treatments often produce non-results."

But Boss also knows there are some boomers (like me) who could never see themselves undergoing the kind of radical realignments they've watched on TLC.

The 58-year-old doctor, who's had a practice in Hackensack since 1982, has developed a new, minimally invasive laser face-lift called Cool Lift. The surgery takes between an hour and 90 minutes — depending on whether he's doing just the mid-face or including the neck. That is about a third of the time required for the standard face-lift. The procedure also has a short recuperation time, reduces potential complications and does not require general anesthesia, Boss says.

"It's tremendously appealing to the patients that it can be done under straight local," he says. "And the patients feel that it takes 10 years off them, at least."

June Esposito of Montville attests to this. The 57-year-old Realtor, who also works as a middle-school personal aide, had sworn she would never have a face-lift. But in January, she decided to give Boss' Cool Lift a shot.

"I went right back to work," she says. "And I did not get one black and blue."

The end result? "It's fantastic. It took 15 to 20 years off me without changing my look at all," Esposito says.

She describes the reactions of the men she plays golf with every spring: "This year, every one of them came up and said, 'What did you do to your hair? You look fantastic.' My hair was exactly the same. One said, 'Did you join a gym?' I'm 10 pounds heavier than I was last year."

Boss' Cool Lift, which does involve an incision, combines four components, including a cool-light laser for internal laser liposuction sculpting. The laser's wavelength stimulates collagen cells to tighten and to produce more collagen, leading to better skin retraction on the face and under the neck, Boss says.

Although D'Amico stresses that my fear of general anesthesia is unwarranted — "Only healthy people should have cosmetic surgery, and the risk of a healthy person dying under anesthesia is no different than the risk of getting on an airplane," he says — I'd still be leery of ever having it for elective surgery. I suspect there are other people who feel the same way.

And so, on a recent day in Boss' office, I was heartened not only to see the impressive result of Ann Goldstein's Feb. 15 Cool Lift, but to hear her describe it.

"I was awake the whole time, but was not aware of anything," says Goldstein, who lives in Warwick, N.Y., and has a Nutley therapy practice (and declined to give her age).

She says she had her Cool Lift on a Friday, was back to work the next Thursday and could have returned even earlier.

Goldstein's surgery (which involved both the face and the neck) took about an hour and 20 minutes, Boss says. He points to before and after photos at various post-surgery intervals, and to her enviably taut jaw line today.

"You can see it actually gets better over time," he says.

Boss, who's been doing these procedures for only about a year and a half, concedes that he can't say exactly how long results will last, but he expects the Cool Lift's results to last as long as a regular face-lift.

As Esposito puts it, many of us feel decades younger than our chronological age, which may explain why boomers are turning to plastic surgeons.

"[Inside] I am back in college. I'm still 21 or 22, and every now or then I'd look in the mirror and go, 'Oh, wow, is that me?'" she says of her pre-lift reflection. "You want to look how you feel, without looking unnatural."