

Using a patient's own plasma, 'vampire facelift' claims to smooth complexion

By Melissa Heckscher, Los Angeles Daily News

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Redondo Beach based Dr. Gail Humble performs facelifts using platelet-rich plasma harvested from the patient's own blood, which is injected into the skin. The procedure is often called a "vampire facelift."
(Robert Casillas/Torrance Daily Breeze)

Forget fangs. Turns out, needles work just as well.

Those thirsty for a younger appearance may be interested in a new cosmetic procedure that uses a person's own blood to smooth out wrinkles and rejuvenate the complexion.

The procedure has been dubbed The Vampire Facelift, (a term trademarked by Alabama cosmetic surgeon Charles Runels), but is technically known as PRP (Platelet Rich Plasma) therapy.

It involves taking a vial of the patient's blood, isolating the platelet-rich plasma and injecting it back into the face or other areas of the body. In theory, the platelets, which contain important growth factors, should ignite tissue regeneration and stimulate collagen production.

The result: smoother, younger-looking skin.



Blood is spun in a centrifuge to separate the plasma before it's injected into the skin by Redondo Beach-based Dr. Gail Humble for a "vampire facelift."
(Robert Casillas/Torrance Daily Breeze)

"This is the future of cosmetic procedures," said Dr. Gail Humble, a Redondo Beach anesthesiologist who recently began offering the treatment at her office. "I think there will always be a place for a quick fix in a filler, but this will really affect the market."

Humble said patients can expect improved skin clarity, tone and volume. Since the treatment relies on the person's own cells to do the work, she added, it won't add volume where there wasn't any before.

"It is only going to take you back to where you were," Humble said. "If you want to have huge lips and you never had them, this isn't your guy."

The Vampire Facelift is not, technically speaking, a face-lift (face-lifts require the surgical cutting and removal of sagging skin). Instead, the procedure is noninvasive, similar to line-plumpers such as Sculptra and Radiesse. Side-effects are minimal and include, primarily, redness around the treated area that subsides within a day or two. Cost of the procedure is \$600 to \$1,800, comparable to that of fillers. Results are gradual and may last up to two years, Humble said.

PRP proponents say because the procedure uses a patient's own blood, there is no chance of an allergic reaction, as is the risk with other fillers and line-erasers.

There's also no down time, though patients will have needle marks or a "scratched" appearance for a day or two following the procedure. Many patients like the idea of a cosmetic treatment that doesn't use chemicals or toxins -- Botox, for example, uses the toxin botulinum to relax wrinkles.

That was the case with Torrance resident Amy Carter, who underwent the PRP procedure several weeks ago hoping to soften some of the fine lines and sun damage on her face.

"I wanted something natural," said Carter, who has tried other noninvasive procedures such as Botox and Restylane. "I don't want to do the fillers anymore because I think it starts to look fake.

"I'm 40," she added. "I should have wrinkles."

Three weeks after the procedure, she said she sees a subtle difference.

"In the tone and texture, I would say there's more of a glow," Carter said, adding that she'd like to go back for the recommended second treatment. "There's more of a brightness."

For patients wanting more than just a subtle change, cosmetic surgeon Andre Berger of Rejuvalife Vitality Institute in Beverly Hills recommends combining PRP therapy with a filler such as Juvederm.

"(Vampire therapy) is not the miracle filler," Berger said. "Patients will be greatly disappointed if you try to say it was a comparative option to using a filler. It can be used in conjunction with a filler to enhance the effects ... kind of like fertilizer is used to make a more beautiful garden."



This is a patient after receiving a "vampire facelift" from Redondo Beach-based Dr. Gail Humble using plasma from the patient's own blood.
(Robert Casillas/Torrance Daily Breeze)

But not everyone is sinking their teeth into the new trend.

Phil Haeck, past president of the American Academy of Plastic Surgeons, said he has yet to see proof that the procedure works. "It makes me nervous to be doing something like this with no real scientific studies having been done to prove that it is successful," Haeck said. "I haven't seen a published study with evidence."

Haeck, who works as a plastic surgeon in Seattle, said he worries about blood being left behind causing long-term changes in the skin. "During a face-lift, we work very, very hard to avoid leaving blood behind, so why would this make any sense?" he said.

The technology behind vampire therapy isn't new. Doctors have long been using a person's own plasma to help with bone healing after spinal injuries and to aid in soft tissue recovery after plastic surgery.

PRP therapy also has gained popularity among athletes -- golfer Tiger Woods and the Pittsburgh Steelers' Hines Ward have reportedly undergone treatments -- though recent studies cast doubt as to whether it works for joint-related injuries. The bottom line, says Haeck, is wait and see.

"I don't think you can make a leap of faith and say that because it works with injuries it's going to work in a non-injured face," he said. "Would I change my mind if I saw a science to this after two to three years? Yes. But there's no science, there's no evidence, so I wouldn't make any claims that it is risk-free until I see long-term studies."



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