



vampire weekend

Could you overcome a lifelong fear of blood and needles if it meant looking five years younger? Hell, yes, said our intrepid senior editor, *Kate Rae*. She put aside her squeamishness to test out Selphyl, the newest anti-aging weapon.

I'VE BEEN WALKING AROUND THE PAST FEW MONTHS WITH "I HAD A ROUGH YEAR" ETCHED INTO MY FACE. Staring down the barrels of the last year of my 30s and my first – and, hopefully, only – divorce has left its toll: I look wiped out and unhappy. Lines that had lightly skimmed along my face have become indelible stamps, feathery strokes have become deep grooves, the lines bracketing my lips have sharpened and the area below my eyes has hollowed.

Still, I was a bit surprised when I heard myself volunteer to undergo what's being billed as the "vampire facelift," thanks to the fact that it involves getting your own plasma (phobia #1: blood) injected into your skin (phobia #2: needles). But up went my hand, along with my hopes that maybe – just maybe – a tiny part of the last year can be erased.

Used for years to help promote wound healing, Selphyl is now being hailed as the next great beauty invention. Though its results aren't as instant as fillers like Restylane, it is 100 percent natural and works by promoting tissue repair, collagen production and cell growth. At about \$800 to \$1,200 per treatment, it takes a few weeks for the effects to show, but the results can last for up to 18 months.

I walk into Dr. William Middleton's downtown-Toronto office a couple of weeks later and he talks me through the procedure. I do my best to avoid fainting and feel relieved when he says that there aren't any risks *really*....

"We overcorrect," he warns, "so your face is going to look..."

"Crazy?" I offer.

"Well, swollen," he says. "It will go down in a few days. Maybe some bruising. The needles are really tiny, but obviously it's going to be a little uncomfortable."

Two vials of blood are taken from my arm (I am very – but not totally – brave) and brought into the next room to be put in a centrifuge. I ask to see it and am led over to a nondescript box humming away. "Ahh," I say, nodding and feeling moderately queasy from the blood loss. Dr. Middleton gives me a juice box, a cookie and an arched eyebrow, which I am too woozy to dispute. Six minutes later, the machine has done its job, separating my blood into a parfait of red and white blood cells and plasma – the stuff we will be using – which is the colour of the apple juice I had been enjoying up until that moment. Dr. Middleton adds a coagulant to my plasma to create the Platelet-Rich Fibrin Matrix – yes, the stuff that will be injected into my face. (In fact, it can be used on everything from acne scars and neck rings to cellulite divots and hand wrinkles.)

How can I describe the sensation of having a needle poked repeatedly into my skin other than saying that it feels like having a needle poked repeatedly into my skin? I lose track of how many times it goes in, but over and over it plunges into the parentheses around my lips and the hollow lines that are an inch below my eyes. Uncomfortable my ass. I wince. I swear a couple of times. There is even some swooning. (Note: If you have a pain threshold that is so ridiculously low that you have ever, say, punched a bikini waxer or screamed like ▶

Ned Flanders while having your eyebrows threaded, the proffered numbing cream just might not cut it.)

Finally it's over.

"It looks really good," say Dr. Middleton and his nurse. I nod, relieved and slightly reassured that the pain will be worth it.

The doctor positions me in front of the camera for my "after" pic. I excitedly glance at the mirror and am suddenly awash with regret and revulsion: My face is swollen, bruised and blotchy, covered with streaks of blood and mascara. I begin to worry that Selphyl is actually called the "vampire face-lift" because I won't be able to show my face in sunlight ever again.

I ride my bike home slowly, woozily, hideously, certain that I will run into every ex, every current crush. When I get home, I expect the dog to not know who I am, like the kids in makeover shows who no longer recognize their mothers. I collapse on the couch, take a painkiller and spend the evening icing my face. I marvel that the swelling somehow makes my nose look bigger and my eyes and mouth smaller - neither of which is a desired effect. What have I done?

The next day, I wake up looking like I've been on a week-long salt, tears and booze bender. I press the mushy area under my eyes and wonder if my orbital bones will ever reappear.

"How do you look?" asks a friend on the phone.

"Like a Yorkshire pudding," I say.

The rest of the weekend passes in a haze of ice packs, Advil and remorse. I worry that I have caused permanent damage, that I will be one of the entries on awfulplasticsurgery.com - just another foolish woman whose shallowness got the best of her. Soon, though, like Dr. Middleton had promised, the swelling fades and the bruising subsides. I stop worrying that I'm going to look like Mickey Rourke forever and, in fact, kind of forget that I ever had it done. But then, five weeks later, the effects start to show.

"You look good," my sister says, her head cocked, knowing nothing about the procedure. I laugh, having just come through a three-day-long migraine. I should, by all rights, look like hell (I've never been one of those women who does tired well), but I go to the mirror and am pleasantly surprised at what I see. The next day, a co-worker tells me that I look five years younger.

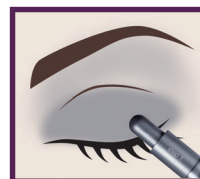
Selphyl doesn't scream "I've had work done," but I do look fresher and more rested. My face looks fuller and calmer somehow. I look like me - just a little bit softer, a little bit younger and, yes, a little bit happier. ☺

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