

ALTERNATIVE THERAPIES

COLLAGEN STIMULATION THERAPY

WHO says taking care of yourself has to be all pain and no pleasure? In this weekly feature, we trial the very best therapies that promise to deliver sterling results without the hint of a needle or a knife...



by Regina Lavelle

My face was red, my eyes watery and my cheeks puffy – but it was worth it!

IN the interests of disclosure, I have to admit that I signed up for this treatment without really considering what it would entail.

There were definitely moments when I chided myself but, two odd months on, I'm glad I did because, in spite of the fairly significant cost – and, it has to be said, fairly significant mortification – this does work.

Collagen stimulation therapy (CST) is more commonly known as skin needling. It is often offered as an add-on to those having facelifts as, done correctly, it improves the appearance of wrinkles by encouraging the production of collagen as a natural filler. It can also improve sun damage, scarring, uneven tone and dilated blood vessels.

Badly performed, however, it will merely leave you red faced, literally and figuratively, as it costs in the region of €250 to €300.

It goes without saying that this isn't a treatment for the faint-hearted. There were moments, particularly when teenage schoolgirls were laughing and pointing at me on the Dart – in fairness my face was tomato red and I looked like I was crying – that I wished I'd had a hip flask to hand. But I've found the results so impressive that I've decided it was worth it.

The basic premise is that the needling causes minor wounds – 'microscopic trauma' – to the skin which is prompted to begin healing itself. The healing encourages the production of collagen and elastin. Three weeks before my first session with Corinna and the tiny barbed rolling pin, I

had to begin taking supplements – collagen and vitamin C every day – and using an 'Environ' vitamin A cream and a specialised SPF. The creams are intended to prime the skin so the impact of the needling is maximised.

On the day of the first treatment, my skin was cleansed and prepped with an alcohol solution before a thick layer of topical anaesthetic was applied.

Then what looked like cling film was placed over my face with holes for my mouth and nose and I was left for 45 minutes.

Nothing at first, I fell asleep on the heated bed. When I woke up it felt a bit like I'd had a dental anaesthetic injected into my face.

Then Corinna took the sterile roller and began. She started off very gently and it only felt uncomfortable going across my nose and a little bit around my hairline. The needling was over quite

quickly – about 20 minutes in total. Then the anaesthetic was gently removed and some vitamin A hydrating oil was applied as the skin is particularly vulnerable.

WAS I red? Hell yes – and my cheeks were puffy and my eyes watery. It didn't really abate until later that night.

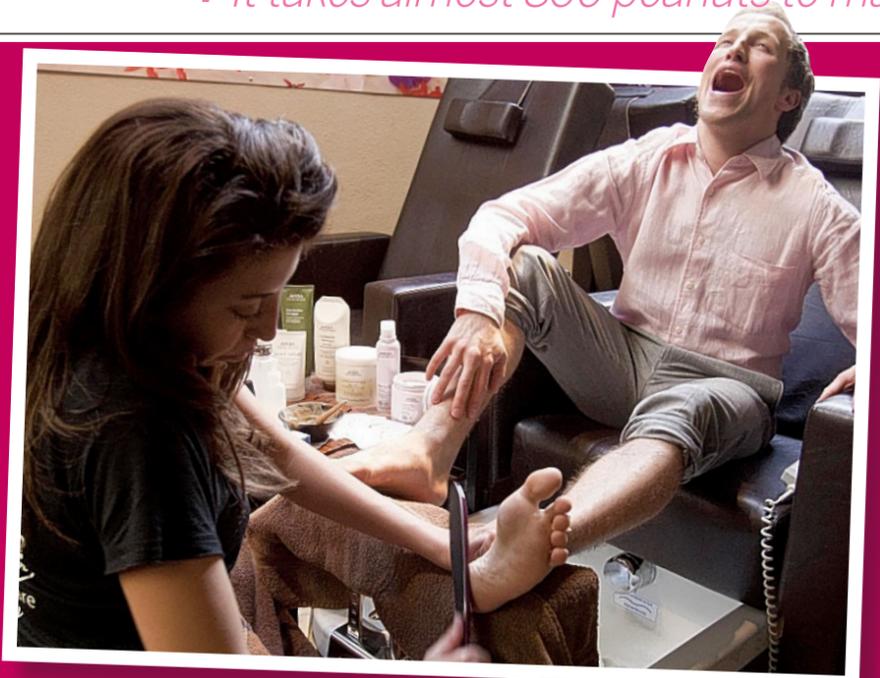
I had three treatments, each a month apart. After the first I found little difference. After the second, the recovery time was shorter and I saw a distinct change in my appearance. After the third, the redness went down in hours.

But it was only a few weeks after my last treatment that I began to notice the real improvements – tighter, plumper, tauter skin.

There is no doubt that this treatment is expensive and involved. But it works.

THE COST: €250 a treatment, €600 for three, €900 for six
THE LOCATION: Monica Tolan, 2 Vauxhall Street, Balbriggan, Co. Dublin, visit monica.tolan.com, 01 841 1678

Well made-up
The value of the European cosmetics market in 2010 was €67billion, the Irish market was worth €110m of that



Foot work: Andy gets a tickling feeling as his heels are filed

REAL MEN DO WEAR NAIL POLISH

So should you send your other half for a pedicure?

by Andy Jones

MY FEET – which normally only greet the insides of runners or stiff office brogues – are today being introduced to designer scrubs, pumice stones and 'male polish'.

Previously as unloved as the mismatched socks I put on them, my gnarly feet have found a refuge in the gentle hands of a tender therapist. And, my goodness, is she working her magic. I haven't seen this much power-sanding since I resurfaced the kitchen table and the resulting tickling has me squealing like a piglet. But, surprisingly, I'm loving every moment.

Today, I'm joining the growing army of men investing in pedicures – reports suggest an increase in the numbers of businessmen, bankers and builders slipping off their brogues for a foot overhaul.

'Men don't want women to recoil in horror when they see their toes,' says Aveda chiropodist Jess Sproson. 'They have the same problems as women – dry skin, calluses, ingrown toenails – it's just they tend to ignore them.'

Men having foot treatments is not new. Babylonian rulers would receive pedicures, while Roman generals were known to have blood-red varnish put on their hands and feet before they rode into battle to show off their wealth. If a bit of polish helped soldiers, I can only hope it might at least improve my performance in a pub quiz.

My feet and I have stood together through marathons and weekly five-a-side football matches, and once avoided serious injury after I accidentally kicked a coffee table in the dark. This, however, has

not made them pretty. My feet are a roadmap of ills – hard skin, running blisters and a yellow tinge. In short, they are ugly and I am self-conscious.

Yet I still do nothing about it. My beauty regime – if you can call a slap of moisturiser and a shave a 'regime' – is outward facing. If a woman can see it, I improve it. My feet do not come into this category.

I had long assumed by the time a woman sees a man barefoot she has already decided she fancies him. A bumpy toe wasn't going to be a deal-breaker.

I am told as soon as I arrive at my local beauty salon that my 'feet need feeding'. On the menu is a luxurious vanilla-essence treatment, followed by a foot file and an organic walnut scrub, then a lower leg and foot massage. Oh, and a polish of my choice.

'Many men choose a clear polish to set the look off,' Jess tells me. Wearing polish on my toenails – even if it is clear – seems absurd.

It's odd – though pleasant – to have a glamorous woman soaping my legs. I did worry how my feet would compare to those of other blokes, but the stories chiropodist Jess recalls put me at ease.

'Some men have developed feet like hooves, where the skin is close to tree bark,' she confides. 'But by the end of the treatment they're practically bouncing – and usually booking a return visit.'

I am soon under the spell. After my soaping I am still a little uncomfortable with someone touching my feet – even my girlfriend of three years won't touch them, describing them as 'leather wedges'. But the 'stress-fixing' scrub wins me over and

I am soon loving every caress and rub. I am then told to lie back and inhale an aromatic vanilla oil.

My reverie is broken when my therapist starts shaving huge curls of dead skin off the soles of my feet. She then retrieves what looks like a medieval instrument of torture and puts the sharp end to my toes.

Surely this isn't necessary – how much harm can a bit of dead skin cause?

A lot, apparently: 'As men rarely wear open-toed shoes their feet are encased almost constantly. All that moist, dead skin causes infections, growths and feet so damp that the skin starts to pucker.'

DESPITE my wincing, I don't suffer any real pain and once my toenails are nicely buffed, I am offered a 'male varnish'.

After some coaxing, I am enduring a 'deep masculine maroon' shade, which I am sure clashes horribly with my hairy toes. In fact, by the time the first foot is done I am begging my therapist to remove it before it dries.

My machismo is partly restored by a wonderful leg and foot massage – and, yes, I know how foolish that sounds. But there is something incredibly intimate and empowering about having someone rub your feet. I close my eyes, zone out and have to be gently shaken awake after a blissful five minutes.

Back home – sans polish – I love the results. I can't stop admiring my new trotters. They are smooth, smell delicious and each step feels like it is embossed with a feel-good sheen. That said, my girlfriend still won't touch them.