

AGEING GRACEFULLY

Busting myths about aesthetic medicine's role. Four doctors tell us how we can avoid falling for fake news



No one can stop the wheels of time from turning, but we can certainly do something about how it affects the way we look.

So, what does it mean to age gracefully?

Dr Joyce Lim of Joyce Lim Skin and Laser Clinic says ageing gracefully means embracing ageing with confidence.

"In the past, the term referred to people getting old without doing any procedures to maintain their looks," she says. "Nowadays, getting plastic surgery or non-surgical aesthetic procedures to look good is no longer a taboo. Older people are going for these procedures to look younger or reverse the signs of ageing – basically to look natural and a younger version of themselves. Even the millennials are going for aesthetic treatments to delay the signs of ageing."

To Dr David Loh of David Loh Surgery, it means looking good, but in a way that is in sync with the rest of the body. And looking good, he says, does not always mean looking young, as one can look good at any age.

"When I turned 50, I stopped trying to cover my gray hairs because a full head of black hair would not match my face," says Dr David Loh.

LOOKING GOOD WHATEVER YOUR AGE

Modern medicine has definitely made it much easier for us to look good as the years roll by.

Best of all, improved technology means natural beauty can be attained through non-invasive treatments, says Dr Terence Tan, director of Halley Medical Aesthetics. "Skin rejuvenation procedures like Ultherapy are great for improving skin laxity due to ageing and sun exposure."

Ultherapy is a U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) cleared, non-invasive skin tightening treatment using ultrasound energy to stimulate the production of collagen. The treatment targets the dermis and the underlying fibromuscular layer that holds the skin in place, without needles, cutting or disturbing the surface of the skin. Ultherapy also allows direct visualisation of the tissue that is being treated, so doctors can precisely target the particular tissue to be tightened.

Since the art of helping patients age gracefully is not only knowing what to recommend, but also when to hold back, Dr David Loh cautions against "throwing everything" at the patient.

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WHAT THEY SAY



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To find that balance, a doctor has to take into account the expectations of the patient, says Dr Terence Tan. "While too little treatment would not meet the patient's expectations, the doctor should also try not to over-treat the patient, as that would be 'exceeding the expectations of the patient' in an undesirable way!"

TRUE OR FALSE

In the quest to age gracefully, not only does one face a plethora of treatment options available – there are also plenty of myths and misinformation to dispel.

According to Dr Georgia Lee, founder of TLC Lifestyle Practice, one of the most common myths is that aesthetic treatments make us look unnatural and affect our expressions.

"Non-invasive lifting treatments take time to manifest results and the results may range from dramatic to minimal, depending on the skin stage presented to the doctor, the intensity of treatment, the device chosen and the fine-tuning of the practitioner's protocol," she explains, adding that the main aim of non-invasive

lifting treatments is to rejuvenate the skin and tighten it. "They do not affect expressions."

The treatment that can affect expressions is botulinum toxin injection.

"When botulinum toxin came into the market 30 years ago, doctors were over-treating the wrinkles," explains Dr Joyce Lim. "The trend then among patients was to erase every single wrinkle, hence people were walking around with a frozen look. There was no expression on the face and the only muscles that moved on the face were the mouth muscles. Today, doctors know better and the aim of treatment is to soften the lines and not erase them – to look fresh instead of frozen."

Another misconception is that patients will look worse than before they started treatment if they stop follow-up treatments. "Ageing is an ongoing process and non-invasive treatment's key function is to partially neutralise an ongoing process – and this is subjective," Dr Georgia Lee says.

"If one maintains the treatment sessions at reasonable intervals that are timed to neutralise the visible signs of ageing – with everything else, such as weight, health, stress levels and sleep

quality being status quo – the appearance can be preserved. But if one ceases all forms of maintenance, eventually, the natural, physical signs of ageing will set in, making one appear "worse". In fact, it is often a matter of perception because one is simply not used to unmaintained looks."

Yet another myth is that treatments with little or no downtime are not good, notes Halley Medical Aesthetics' Dr Terence Tan.

"This is not true," he says, pointing to advances in medical technology and innovative treatment methods that produce results with minimal to no downtime.

He also addresses concerns about pain, noting that since aesthetic patients are not sick, every treatment should be made comfortable through adequate preparation. This includes performing procedures with good technique and at appropriate power levels, together with the use of numbing cream and medications. These steps will allow the doctor to perform a comfortable yet effective treatment.

Meanwhile, Dr Joyce Lim says some men mistakenly fear looking feminine after undergoing aesthetic procedures.

"Men can look good and masculine if the procedures are done correctly," she says. "We know that men and women have different facial features that are unique to each gender. Hence, men can go for aesthetic procedures to enhance their manliness and look younger. They just have to find a competent doctor. There are some societies that try to create 'pretty boys' and use aesthetic procedures to feminise the men. However, this is not for everyone."

HOW TO KEEP IT REAL

Obviously, everyone should do proper research before going for treatments. And by that, we don't just mean Googling. While Google is useful in providing us with instant information on any aesthetic procedure, "beware of vested interest and jealous competitors in anything you read. Take everything with a pinch of salt," cautions Dr David Loh.

For a start, go to proper aesthetic clinics and get referrals by word-of-mouth.

"Certain treatments like Ultherapy have certified original user labels, which you should look out for in the clinics," says Dr David Loh.

In addition, Ultherapy has been commonly compared to other High-Intensity Focused Ultrasound treatments when in fact, they are vastly different. The latter are not FDA-cleared, may lack adequate clinical evidence and may not even be administered by doctors.

In fact, Halley Medical Aesthetics' Dr Terence Tan says one should not be embarrassed to ask embarrassing questions about the origin of the equipment and their authenticity. "A good doctor would take his time to answer these concerns prior to treatment."

Suspicious should also be aroused when you encounter scenarios at both ends of the spectrum – when treatments are too cheap, or when a clinic is pushy in selling you expensive packages.

"Beware of packages, because why should treatments that have consistent and reproducible results, like Ultherapy, need patients to commit to a course of treatments?" Dr David Loh asks. "If such a commitment is needed, it means the treatment they intend to give you is too mild or probably a dud."

THE BOTTOM LINE?

"Don't rush into treatments without understanding more about what it can offer, its limitations, your comfort level and the long-term commitment needed," advises Dr Georgia Lee. "If something sounds too good to be true, it often is so."