

The truth about....

COSMETIC FACIAL ACUPUNCTURE



TESTED BY JOELY WALKER, BEAUTY DIRECTOR

The latest wellness buzz, rooted in ancient Chinese medicine, promises to tackle a whole host of skin concerns with a few (OK, *a lot*) of needles...

THE SPIEL: Originating in traditional Chinese medicine, acupuncture has been around for millennia and is universally celebrated for treating an assortment of issues, from headaches to infertility, by rebalancing Qi (life energy) throughout the body. Of late, the age-old practice has seen a huge resurgence in popularity thanks to a focus on facial acupuncture – with over 17,000 #facialacupuncture posts flooding Instagram, and an increasing number of industry devotees. A mind-meets-complexion treatment, sessions focus on aesthetic concerns like acne, dermatitis, scars and fine lines. 'Inserting tiny, thread-thin needles into the skin relaxes facial tissue, defines, sculpts and encourages renewed circulation,' explains celebrated cosmetic acupuncturist Sarah Bradden. 'It focuses on rejuvenating skin and addressing concerns by stimulating skin mechanisms from within the dermis, resulting in a more noticeably invigorated and youthful complexion.' Taking an all-round holistic approach, Sarah's in-demand treatment combines facial acupuncture with reflexology, Gua sha

and facial cupping, to activate healing energy channels on the face and body, reduce fluid retention, tone facial contours and ultimately restore the body back into a harmonic state. So far so dreamy, but does it deliver?

THE REALITY: Sarah's treatment begins with a tongue diagnosis (a key indicator of your general health) and quick consultation to see where I'm currently at, asking not only what areas I'd like to focus on facially (my own wish list including improved glow alongside reducing fine frown lines and rosacea redness), but also mentally and physically (think anything from stress relief, improved concentration and better sleep). 'By focusing on the client as a whole rather than separately we create a much greater shift in the body,' promises Sarah.

Five minutes later, I'm horizontal on the treatment bed and Sarah places two small tubes up my nostrils – a unique part of her treatment that delivers 'activated' oxygen (an essentially A-grade form that 'improves the body's uptake, transportation and utilisation of oxygen') throughout the 90-minute session – and a heated LED light on to my bare stomach (more on the benefits later). Then come the needles – roughly 30 of them placed carefully in my face and different parts of my body, including my feet, head and ears. 'Specific points on the body and face correlate with certain organs, as well as the nervous system,' explains Sarah.

'I adapt my combination of needle points depending on what elements I'm treating, whether that's digestive, hormones, stress, ageing or acne. It's important not to over-needle on the first treatment, and to work up over a course, to say, 150 needles.'

Although the needles look somewhat menacing in my post-treatment pictures, there's little if any pain involved – more of a scratching on the skin's surface and a slight twinge when the needle enters a particularly tender point (my own being – oddly – my ears, which I later find out is a positive sign of clearing and unblocking). 'Most of my clients find it super relaxing and fall asleep, so that gives you an idea of the pain level,' she laughs.

Once I've taken on my role as pin cushion, the LED light therapy goes into action over my face too, which has been proven to activate cellular regulation. 'This is a non-invasive, unique and highly advanced addition to cosmetic acupuncture. Credited by NASA research, the specific wavelengths of light help to promote overall healing, collagen and elastin,' adds Sarah. Finally, once the needles come out around 40 minutes later there's the addition of reflexology, Gua sha (another ancient Chinese treatment using a handheld gem-stone device to massage and improve microcirculation) and cupping (also shown to improve blood flow).

THE VERDICT: I've tried a lot of facials in my time as a



beauty director, but little compares to the overall mind and body effect this had on me. Much more than a facial treatment, when I finally emerge from my half-snooze state, I forget to even look in the mirror. It's only after Sarah mentions I look 'glowing' that I remember my primary reason for initially booking in was complexion-based. When I finally look, the first thing that strikes me is my cheekbones seem like they've been hoisted upward, and I do – as Sarah said – appear infinitely glowier than when I walked in (the instant result of a good facial oil and massage). On further inspection, that fine frown line is – dare I say it – less noticeable, but, oddly, it isn't this that I take away and tell my friends about. I *feel* better in myself – calmer, like my cortisol levels have dropped from 100 to 10. 'The treatment releases feel-good hormones like dopamine and serotonin, which should leave you feeling much brighter, lighter, calmer and more restored,' Sarah explains. 'Something that's positively reflected in our face and skin, too.' I'm sold, booked in for treatment number two and spend the next few days waxing lyrical about Sarah's wellness wizardry.

GET YOUR ZEN ON

Bed Of Nails Acupressure Pillow, £40, works on increasing blood flow via the sharp plastic 'needles' to help alleviate headaches and boost energy levels.



Supercharge your face mask with Foreo UFO Smart Mask Treatment Device, £249.

Practise Gua sha with Odacité's Gua Sha Green Aventurine Beauty Tool, £40.



Give DIY cupping a whirl with Skin Gym Face And Body Cupping Set, £32.



The Omorovicza Rose Quartz Face Roller, £40, helps to get your circulation going.

WHERE TO GO

LONDON

Sarah Bradden, Harvey Nichols, Knightsbridge, SW1X 7RJ
 £250 for 90-minute Signature Facial and Body Balancing Treatment
 (harveynichols.com/store/knightsbridge/sarah-bradden/)

MANCHESTER

Amanda Suarez Cooper, Green Walk Acupuncture Clinic, M16 9RF
 From £40 (ascacupuncture.co.uk)

LEEDS

Caroline Haigh, Calverley & Rawdon Acupuncture Clinic, LS19 6AZ
 From £50 (leedsacupuncture.co.uk)

FOREO: FOREO; GUA SHA: ODACITE; CUPPING: SKIN GYM; FACE ROLLER: OMOROVICZA; PILLOW: BED OF NAILS; HAIR: JEFFREY MATEER; MAKEUP: JEFFREY MATEER; STYLING: JEFFREY MATEER; HAIR: JEFFREY MATEER; MAKEUP: JEFFREY MATEER; STYLING: JEFFREY MATEER