

**T**In his day, George Orwell thought that everyone at 50 had the face he deserved.

Were he alive today he might say that everyone at 50 has the face he can afford.

Nowadays age truly is a state of mind, and plastic surgery makes it easier to not mind the passing of the years.

Ironically, the most common form of cosmetic surgery isn't actually surgery at all. Botox injections have become the most popular way to cover time's tracks. Last year, 4.6 million procedures were performed in the United States, according to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons.

Botox is a drug made from a toxin produced by the bacterium *Clostridium botulinum*, the same toxin that causes botulism. When used cosmetically, Botox temporarily eliminates wrinkles by paralyzing the muscles that cause them.

"The toxin inhibits nerves from working to stimulate muscles, relaxing laugh lines or tension lines," explains Dr. Paula Legere of Summit Plastic Surgery.

"The first dose lasts three months. After that, injections tend to last longer ... four or five or six months."

Approved by the FDA for treatment of frown lines between the eyebrows, Botox is also used to treat lines and wrinkles on the forehead and around the eyes and, as a side benefit, can prevent tension headaches and facial muscle spasms. The drug was first approved to treat crossed and lazy eyes. It was in that context that doctors discovered the smoothing effect Botox has on wrinkles around the eyes and on the forehead.

Like any drug, Botox can produce unpleasant side effects – droopy eyelids and, rather famously, a frozen looking facial countenance.

"If you overuse it then you don't have any facial expression," Legere says.

The best way to minimize the risks is by receiving injections only from a board-certified plastic surgeon or dermatologist.

Or avoid the needle altogether.

There are alternative therapies that produce results similar to Botox. The catch is, you have to work at them.

There are more than 200 topical potions designed to produce Botox-like effects, says Boni Ray Chaney of the Golden Isles Aesthetics Clinic on St. Simons Island.

# Botox

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## pros and cons



By Amy H. Carter