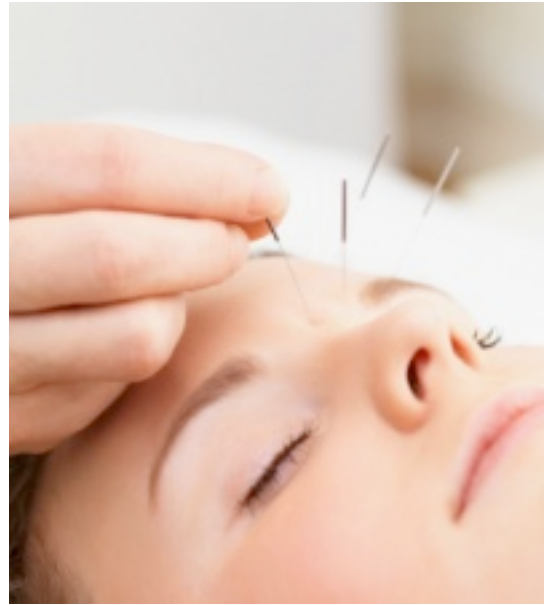


## TCM: The True Anti-Aging Medicine

We all know that there is a tremendous interest these days in any product or procedure that is touted as being “anti-aging”. Despite the state of our economy, people continue to spend billions of dollars a year on therapies and procedures that promise to make them look younger, thinner, or more beautiful. In 2006 people spent over a billion dollars on Botox® injections alone. You can have a procedure to modify almost anything about your body with which you are dissatisfied. There are even websites that offer loans for your cosmetic procedure or shopping sites where you can find the lowest price for the procedure you desire. It is hard to believe the types of surgery that people are willing to have for aesthetic reasons. It’s not only about Botox® (nicknamed the pretty poison) and breast augmentation. People are having chin implants, fat transplantation, arm lifts, ear plastic surgery, cosmetic foot surgery, and even (believe it or not) cosmetic leg lengthening surgery. Even if this was not morally repugnant, there can be serious medical consequences to consider.



The industry has gone so far that there is now a book written for children about mommy’s plastic surgery. One of the cartoon pictures actually shows a little girl looking at her mother’s nose and imaging a scary looking witch. The book continues with mommy going to the doctor’s office, coming home with a Band-Aid on her nose and needing some rest but looking much prettier. When children’s books are being written about how kids can keep up with the world of cosmetic “improvements”, the field has reached a new low in my opinion.

Many cosmetic procedures began as medical treatments. Plastic surgery began as a blessing to those who had been disfigured in an accident, born with a cleft palate or other deformity, or injured in combat. In fact, war injuries accelerated experimentation in plastic surgery after World War I. Since that time the field of plastic surgery has gone from purely being used for reconstructive purposes to repair broken faces to a procedure done in “secret” for beautification purposes, to a time where people openly search for and talk about their cosmetic procedures.

The history of Botox® also begins with its beneficial use. In the 1950s it was discovered to relax hypertensive muscles and spasms and is still used to give relief to patients who suffer from facial, neck, or shoulder spasms.

TCM (Traditional Chinese Medicine) treatments didn't start out being "cosmetic" either but there were unintended outcomes (i.e., "cosmetic" results) of using certain points and techniques. For me, one of the most enjoyable parts of being a TCM practitioner is having the skills and knowledge to help people maintain their youthful appearance without creating any dangerous or potentially damaging side effects. With the use of needling (even shallow needling), herbs, Qigong, and nutritional advice – all basic therapies included in the system of TCM – TCM practitioners can stave off the outward signs of aging. Everything needed is right in the bag of TCM tools. No fancy equipment or "treatments" are needed that our out of their scope of practice. TCM practitioners have the opportunity to use ancient medical practices for more modern purposes.

One of the most important aspects of using TCM for "cosmetic" results is that TCM treats the causes of aging, not just the results of it. This is a huge advantage that TCM has over the practices of many of the modern day cosmetic procedures. One of my favorite things to say about cosmetic acupuncture is that "it is the only cosmetic procedure that actually improves the health of the person while also giving cosmetic results". So let's not lose sight of the fact that acupuncture and Chinese medicine focuses on restoring and maintaining good health, even though that aspect of TCM happens to include cosmetic improvements. Think about the causes of aging and wrinkling from a TCM perspective: Spleen Qi Deficiency creates sinking; digestive problems lead to poor skin condition; lung issues prevent the lungs from properly controlling the skin; Blood Deficiency leads to poor circulation; and Yin Deficiency causes dry skin. These may all be addressed with treatments that reduce the outward appearance of aging – even to the point of making fine lines disappear. What could be better than improving your health at the same time as minimizing wrinkling and sagging?

The main goal of TCM is prevention. Prevention includes everything from preventing disease to preventing what some people call the "ravages of aging" ... in other words, wrinkles, lines, and sagging. Many people maintain a youthful appearance through the use of TCM treatments. Acupuncture and Chinese medicine can create a vibrancy and healthfulness inside that is reflected on the outside.