



Marie Loftus: With so many people seeking quick non-surgical solutions to erase the signs of time, how well are these procedures tolerated in general and is pain an issue?

Dr. Peter Prendergast: Of course pain is always an issue, and the first question many patients ask before a procedure is "Will it hurt, doctor?" Since most of the non-surgical procedures are less invasive than surgery, general anaesthesia or sedation is not required, so you are awake during the treatment. With this in mind, one of the most important factors we consider when administering these procedures is pain-relief. We use a variety of techniques to reduce pain and discomfort, or eliminate it.

ML: What are the most common procedures requiring pain-relief?

Dr.PP: In my practice, I administer some form of anaesthesia or pain-relief for injectable fillers, lip enhancement, some laser treatments, hair removal, thread lifts and Liposelection for fat removal.

ML: What about botox?

Dr.PP: No. Generally no numbing is required before administering botulinum toxin because the needle is extremely small and the injections are quick. A few small pinches are felt - like an insect bite - that pass quickly. Sometimes we scratch or vibrate the surface of the skin immediately before injecting to distract the nerves - a phenomenon based on the so-called 'gate theory of pain'. This relieves the pinch somewhat!

ML: For the other procedures you mentioned, could you tell us how you can make them painless?

Dr.PP: Certainly. Every doctor will have different opinions on the most appropriate pain-relief, or whether it is necessary at all. For fillers, used for softening lines, defining cheeks, augmenting lips and so on, either a topical cream is applied to the skin or a local anaesthetic injection is used, similar to that used by a dentist. I almost always use local anaesthetic injections to numb the treatment area before injecting fillers. Topical creams such as Eutectic Mixture of Local Anaesthetics [EMLA] cream must be applied for about an hour beforehand under an occlusive dressing like cling-film to have any useful numbing power. Even when they are used optimally they are not as effective as local anaesthetic injections. When we use injections, there are two ways to numb an area. Firstly, we can inject the solution - usually lignocaine or a combination of lignocaine and adrenaline to reduce bruising - directly around the area we are planning to fill. This is called infiltrative peripheral anaesthesia. The downside with this is if we fill with local anaesthetic an area we plan to treat with fillers, the local anaesthetic can distort the area and compromise the final aesthetic result. More commonly, I perform regional nerve block anaesthesia. This means we place some local anaesthetic in selected anatomical sites directly around the nerves that provide sensation to the area we plan to treat. For example, numbing the lips prior to lip enhancement requires placing a few injections under the lip towards a nerve in the cheek bone under the eye, and another

Is Becoming Beautiful a Pain?

Rejuvenate caught up with Dr Peter Prendergast about pain relief strategies used by doctors to take the 'ouch' from some common cosmetic procedures

in the chin area. The nerves "blocked" - in this case the infraorbital and mental nerves - normally provide sensation to the lips. The injections themselves are quick and relatively painless - like Botox injections - and the numb feeling wears off in about an hour.

ML: What about laser treatments - do they hurt and do they require anaesthesia?

Dr.PP: It depends on the treatment and laser used. We often use contact cooling as a means of relieving discomfort before and during a laser treatment. Most good lasers and IPLs will have a built-in contact cooling tip. For example, with Titan skin tightening the infrared light does heat the skin quite a bit. The Titan has a tip that cools the skin before, during and after the beam of infrared light passes into the skin, to protect the top layer, and of course provide pain relief. Before IPL hair removal, we apply a cool gel to the skin surface to do the same thing. If a laser is ablative, meaning it peels the skin, sometimes regional anaesthesia like that used for fillers is necessary to relieve pain or discomfort.

ML: You mentioned thread lifts - what do you do to ensure they don't hurt?

Dr.PP: In my experience thread lifts are painless and extremely well tolerated using infiltrative local anaesthesia. After a few quick injections to numb the treatment area, such as around the ear or in the scalp, nothing more is felt. In this case we use local anaesthetic with adrenaline to constrict blood vessels and ensure there is minimal bleeding. As a result, bruising is uncommon afterwards.

During the thread lift procedure, when the threads are passed under the tissues and lifted to suspend them, the only sensation reported is that of mild pressure.

ML: How can fat removal be performed painlessly?

Dr.PP: Of course liposuction and liposculpture procedures can be performed under general anaesthesia or sedation, meaning pain during the procedure is not an issue. However, it is well documented that the safest form of liposuction is that performed totally under tumescent local anaesthesia. Tumescent anaesthesia involves injecting a diluted solution of local anaesthetic in saline, combined with adrenaline and sodium bicarbonate, into the treatment area to make it numb. Firstly, a tiny area is injected to numb the skin. Then a few small punctures are made and the tumescent solution is slowly passed into the fat. Up to 5 litres of solution can be injected in some cases. The treatment area - such as tummy, thighs, arms - swells up with fluid and becomes totally numb. In my practice, I use VASER Liposelection to destroy the fat first with ultrasound, and then remove it with gentle suction. After this form of body contouring, the numbness wears off after a few hours, and then only mild soreness is experienced, easily controlled with paracetamol.

ML: Is there anything that can be taken before these cosmetic procedures to make them more comfortable?

Dr.PP: It is better not to take anything without asking your doctor first. Certain drugs, such as aspirin, Brufen, Ponstan and other non-steroidal anti-inflammatories, might relieve pain but they also increase the risk of bleeding and bruising. If anaesthesia is adequate immediately prior to the procedure, there should be no need to take anything at home beforehand.

ML: What about after the procedure?

Dr.PP: For mild pain or soreness after injectable procedures, paracetamol should be sufficient, but is usually not necessary. For laser or IPL treatments, including hair removal, cold packs can alleviate heat or discomfort for a few hours after the procedure. For fat removal and body contouring such as Liposelection, paracetamol is usually all that is required, but you might be prescribed something stronger in case you need it. If, after any injectable treatment, an area becomes painful after a few days, particularly if it is associated with redness, you should contact your doctor straight away as this could be a sign of infection. Thankfully, a rare occurrence!



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