

I MAY HAVE LOOKED HAGGARD BUT I DIDN'T FEEL IT!

When Evelyn Johnston was approaching her 50th birthday, she felt the face that looked back from the mirror didn't reflect how she felt. Surgery wasn't an option for her so she sought a non-invasive way to tackle ageing...

INTERVIEW: *Patrice Harrington*

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IT IS A DAUNTING milestone for many women, but when Evelyn Johnston turned 50 earlier this year she knew exactly how she wanted to mark her half century. No fancy party, designer shoes or exotic holiday tickled her fancy. Instead, she decided to invest in her skin.

'I was always very outdoor-sy so my skin did suffer an awful lot down through the years,' says the mother of two from Shinrone, Co. Offaly.

'I hiked a lot and ran a lot, and as a child of the Eighties I even sunbathed while covered in baby oil! I was very conscious of the broken thread veins on my face – no matter how much concealer or make-up I put on them, I always felt they stood out. Our Irish fair skin is apparently very prone to it.'

Last year Evelyn had intense pulsed light (IPL) laser

treatment on her face in River Medical in Dublin. 'It's when they train a laser light on your thread veins, which

disperses the blood and makes them disappear. I had three to five sessions of that and I was very happy with the results.

'I also had my skin checked out just in case there was anything untoward there, like a melanoma or serious sun damage – it was very reassuring to discover there wasn't.

'The whole IPL experience was so good it got me interested in other non-invasive procedures available that might enhance my skin,' says Evelyn, who gave up working as a teacher of special needs adults to be a full-time mother to her sons, who are now 18 and 15.

'This year, my skin was starting to look very dry and wasn't looking as bright as it used to. I was putting on this cream and that cream and wondering what was the best. Looking in the mirror, I thought, "I don't feel this old." I thought I could do with a bit of a boost,' she says. 'I was talking to my husband and told him I was >





◀ looking at Fraxel. I explained that it's another laser treatment, and that it's not invasive.'

In fact, the procedure involves fractional lasers penetrating top skin layers to smooth wrinkles and scars by stimulating collagen.

'I was always the last to get my hair done, I'd have to drag myself to the hairdresser,' laughs Evelyn. 'I don't think I'd have the courage to get Botox or go the whole surgical route. Instead I thought Fraxel treatment would do the skin good, brighten it up and get it working from the inside. That's how I justified it!

'I had a consultation with Ailish at River Medical who told me that unlike the IPL there would be down time with Fraxel. Whereas IPL felt like sharp, hot rubber bands targeting the dark colour of the thread veins, Fraxel would treat the whole face. Ailish told me my face would swell, it would be puffy, that I'd be uncomfortable and my skin dry so I would need loads of moisturiser. I wasn't working any more so I knew I could do that,' says Evelyn.

'Ailish joked that I could try going out afterwards but people would run away screaming – you look like you've had a really bad anaphylactic shock.

'Patients need two to three days' downtime so holiday time is the time to do it or maybe just before a long weekend.'

Fraxel is not cheap – Evelyn's treatment and after care cost approximately €1,200.

She says: 'You can have up to eight sessions – it's supposed to be great for acne scars – but I had a course of four treatments, which would be the norm.

'You go in early because it takes about 45 minutes. First they cleanse the skin, then they put on a special cream and let it settle. Then they bring you in and fire up the laser, which is rectangular-shaped.

'The therapist passes it over the skin about eight times. Initially I didn't find it hot – it was more of an ice-cold heat – but by the eighth time it passes over your skin, you are ready to hop off! It depends on your pain level. If you're able to take a bit of pain you're grand, if you're sensitive it will make you jump.

'What the powerful laser does is it puts hundreds of little injuries into the skin in order for the skin to start pumping collagen to heal itself. It forces the skin to renew itself.

'Afterwards your face will start to swell so Ailish put iced cloths on it to bring it down. Then I had down time for about two days – it feels like a sunburn but that dissipated very quickly for me. You swell too, especially in under the eyes but that

also starts to dissipate. You need all that heat and swelling because that's stimulating all the collagen under the skin and forcing the skin to renew itself.'

There is some aftercare – but it doesn't involve expensive creams. 'You have to keep putting lots of moisturiser on your face, which is very dry, but it doesn't have to be the best on the market. The clinic provided Dermaceutic Labs Yellow Cream because the laser can bring out little spots of pigmentation, three days after my treatment, I started putting this on my eyes.

'Another little downside is that if you're inclined to get cold sores it can stimulate your cold sores because it is stimulating all aspects of your skin.' Evelyn got 'a few little cold sores' and

the clinic filled out a prescription for Zovirax antiviral tablets. 'If you take them for three days before your treatment and five days afterwards that keeps everything calm. My husband has a beard and I'm blaming him – no kissing on the face and irritating skin that's already tender!' she laughs.

'As well, after the treatment I did get a tiny little bit of bruising under my eyes that went away. Because the laser gets right in under the eyes, over the eyebrows, the temples, along the lip, around the nose. That's all going to be a little bit tender.'

Slowly but surely Evelyn's skin recovered until she felt pleased with the results.

'What I found, which I was amazed with, is that one day you look in the mirror and the skin is a bit swollen – or a lot swollen depending on how you take it. Then one day you're passing the mirror and you go, "Oh, wow!" My skin looks very



good now.

‘When you’re 50 and going through the change of life you haven’t got all the great hormones you need and my skin was very dry and lifeless. I looked haggard but I didn’t feel haggard. I had been getting crinkles over my eyebrows, now those have disappeared, the lines between my eyebrows have softened, and my skin has a really fresh youthful appearance. When I put my make-up on it isn’t sinking into my pores – that was a great kick! Now when I put my make-up on, it stays on, I don’t have to cake it on. Before I had to put a good moisturiser on, put a primer on, then the foundation.

‘Fraxel gives your skin a lovely fresh, healthy look as if you’ve had a really good rest. My skin was smoother and more even in tone. Psychologically it gave me a great lift.’

The changes weren’t so glaringly obvious that people suspected she’d had work done.

‘People would just say, “You’re looking very well!” I’m thrilled with the results. It’s the single best thing I ever did for myself. The non-invasive procedures are so sophisticated now.’

Of course, these treatments are expensive, but Evelyn justifies the cost. ‘I didn’t want to spend money on a wild party or on clothes. You could go out and spend €1,200 on shoes or nights out. For me it was well worth it. Once the collagen starts to renew itself, six months, eight months down the line, the skin will continue to look better. It is ongoing because it is stimulation from the inside out. In a few years you can have it done again.

‘For anyone who is squeamish about going under the knife I would recommend it. People ask if I’d have it done again? Absolutely.’ ❑



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*People say,
‘You’re looking
very well’. And
I’m thrilled!*
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