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New treatment puts fizz into anti-ageing

Botox could be replaced by carbon dioxide injections
Jon Feingersh/zefa/Corbis



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The gas contained in fizzy drinks and industrial pollutants is being injected under the skin as an alternative to anti-ageing treatments such as Botox. Cosmetic doctors say that injections of pure carbon dioxide (CO₂) help to address an array of age-related problems, from bags under the eyes to baldness.

Half a dozen clinics are already offering sessions of CO₂ injections — at £100 to £200 a time — to treat cellulite or the “stretch marks” associated with puberty, weight gain or pregnancy. The procedure, known as carboxytherapy, is said to rejuvenate the skin and is popular in Brazil and Italy.

Some dermatologists are, however, sceptical of the claims made for the treatment, which is emerging in Britain as new quality standards are about to be introduced for the regulation of injected cosmetic products.

Carbon dioxide occurs naturally as a by-product of aerobic respiration, but researchers say that injections of the gas can trick the body into a response

that encourages new skin cells to grow.

Sabine Zenker, a German doctor who has pioneered the use of carboxytherapy at her clinic in Munich, told *The Times*: "This is quick, largely pain-free and a more natural alternative to dermal fillers and Botox, It only takes four or five minutes, patients just feel a warm sensation and a slight pressure. It is not painful at all."

It is claimed that the technique combats the natural ageing process in which capillaries in the skin become dormant, reducing blood circulation.

The administration of CO2 tricks the body into responding as if there is an oxygen deficit, increasing the blood flow and prompting regeneration of skin cells, resulting in an improved tone and appearance. According to some doctors, it may also help to treat some forms of hair loss by reopening skin pores that have closed, potentially allowing hair to regrow.

About 200,000 non-surgical cosmetic treatments are carried out in Britain each year. At present, Botox, fillers and other injected products are not regulated and can be prescribed inappropriately or administered by untrained beauty therapists.

From next month, a new quality assurance scheme will be introduced in an attempt to prevent unregulated "Botox parties" in the home and protect the public from botched treatments.

Some 5,000 high street clinics are thought to be carrying out the treatments, including cosmetic surgeons' and dentists' surgeries and beauticians. So far, however, fewer than 200 providers have registered with the Independent Healthcare Advisory Services (IHAS) scheme, which will enable consumers to choose a registered provider of treatments.

Carboxytherapy is said to have no side-effects, apart from discomfort or bruising related to the injection, rather than the gas, although a cosmetic doctor said that he would not provide it to patients with serious asthma or breathing difficulties.

Rajiv Grover, secretary of the British Association for Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons, said that more research was needed into the long-term effects of the treatment.

"The most important entity in any treatment is the person holding the syringe. Anyone considering this or similar treatments should focus on the practitioner, either through word of mouth recommendation or by choosing a member of an accredited organisation."