

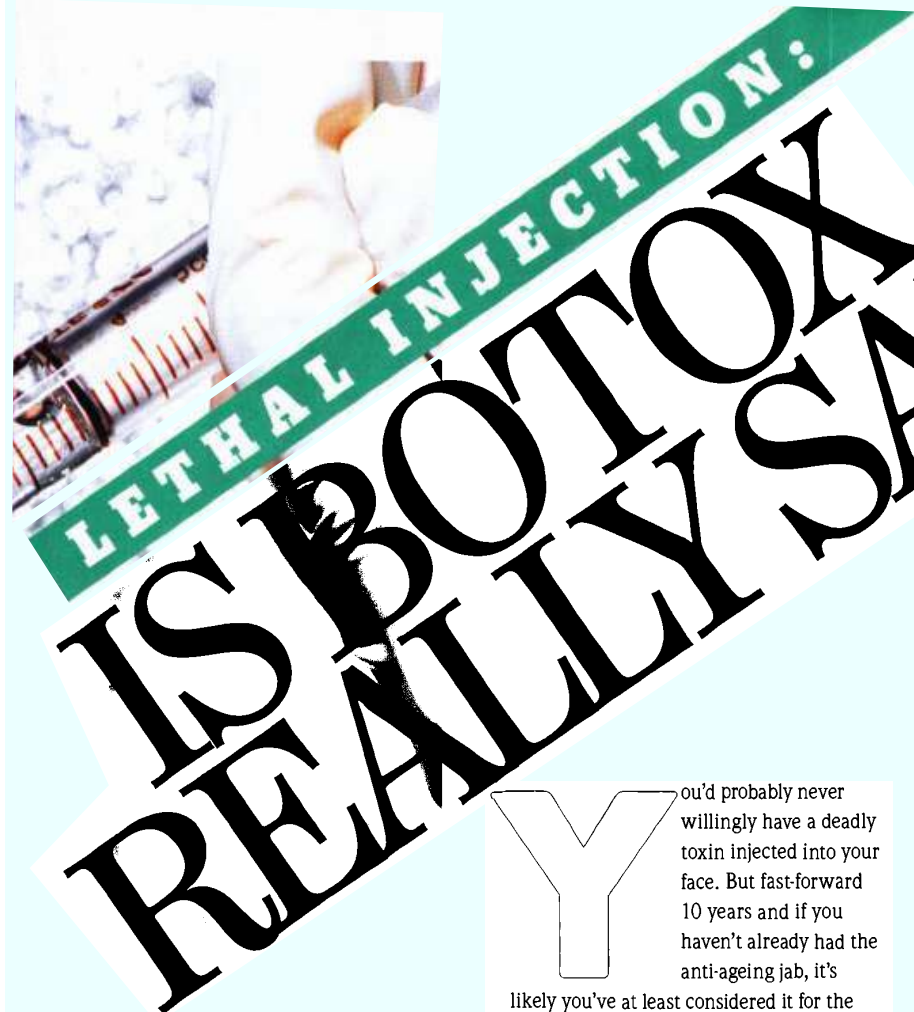
"I'm scrunching
up my face in
pain. For real."

BOTOX BASICS

"If a patient chooses a doctor to conduct their Botox treatment, ideally the doctor should be a member of The Australian Society of Plastic Surgeons or a member of The Australasian Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery," says Dr Ben Norris. "But it's also important to note that there are fully accredited and qualified aestheticians and nurses who perform Botox injections."



Investigation



**ALARMING
NEW REPORTS
CLAIM that
Botox can
actually be fatal
and US health
authorities are
reviewing its
safety. But are
we taking
serious risks
in the name of
a wrinkle-free
future?**

WORDS BY LEAH HARDY/GRAZIA, SNAPPER MEDIA

You'd probably never willingly have a deadly toxin injected into your face. But fast-forward 10 years and if you haven't already had the anti-ageing jab, it's

likely you've at least considered it for the future. Botox is now the world's number one non-surgical treatment, with 2.7 million procedures performed in the US last year. And in 2007, Australians spent more than \$300 million on Botox and other non-surgical procedures. But Botox devotees recently got a massive shock, with The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in the US announcing that it's reviewing the safety of Botox and a similar rival product, Myobloc, after reports it's caused breathing problems – and even death.

According to the US consumer organisation Public Citizen, there have been at least 16 deaths in the US from the use of Botox and Myobloc. Many more people, it says, have suffered complications, such as muscle weakness, leading to the inability to breathe or swallow. The FDA says it's concerned the toxin can spread from the original site of the injection, which can lead to fatal breathing problems. So will this age-defying jab put our lives at risk?

Actually, no. "The evidence points to cosmetic Botox being safe and there

have been no reported deaths in Australia directly linked to the cosmetic use of Botox," says Dr Ben Norris, a cosmetic plastic surgeon from Sydney's Silkwood Medical, and a member of The Australian Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS).

The FDA is concentrating its investigation on medical use, although there are possible side effects of cosmetic use.

"All treatments have side effects," Norris explains. "Most [cosmetic-related Botox treatments] are mild and temporary, for instance, pain, tenderness and bruising at the injection site. However, if not administered by a fully-trained professional, there are risks such as a droopy mouth or eye. It's about doing your research and going to a fully trained, qualified person." Allergan, the makers of Botox, say they've treated more than a million people safely. "There has never been a single reported death where a causal link to the cosmetic use of Botox was established," says medical director Dr Antony Fulford-Smith.

While Allergan concedes medical Botox can have serious side effects, people suffering from severe medical conditions are always more at risk than the rest of us. And, according to consultant plastic surgeon Rajiv Grover, the dose for medical problems is 50 to 80 times higher than the cosmetic dose.

Dermatologist Nick Lowe agrees that cosmetic Botox is safe: "The only cases of severe side effects from cosmetic treatments happened when a US doctor, Dr Bach McComb, injected himself and friends with unpurified, unlicensed toxins," he says. Whereas a vial of Botox contains about 100 units of botulinum toxin, McComb's mixture may have had as many as 10 million units. Lowe says this case emphasises the importance of using a reputable doctor – and a reputable, licensed product. **COSMO**