

# Thermacool: The hot new face-lift

*Non-surgical technology 'shrink-wraps' facial skin*



Photos by Michael R. Brown, FLORIDA TODAY

**Admiring the results.** Halfway through her Thermacool facelift, Susan Gardner examines the difference in appearance of her face.

The same waves that heat up the microwave are being used to tame wrinkles and give patients a quick face-lift.

"It's hot," said Dr. Roger Bassin, a Melbourne plastic surgeon, referring to "Thermacool" - a nonsurgical technology combining heat and cold to achieve the desired cosmetic effect.

Patented by Thermage Inc. of Hayward, Calif., Thermacool delivers radio-frequency pulses deep inside the skin to the underlying collagen tissue, while an icy spray keeps the top layer of skin cool to the touch.

"It's not a new concept, but it's a novel approach, which allows us to heat collagen in a better way," said Bassin, among the only local physicians offering the procedure. ([www.drbassin.com](http://www.drbassin.com))

Heat generated by radio waves produces a "shrink-wrap" effect in the collagen, making the face tighter, he said. And, as fresh collagen strands develop over time - usually within four to six months - "it gets even better."

First approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration in November 2002 for use on the forehead, Thermacool since has been used by many doctors nationally to treat the whole face at a cost of \$4,000 and up.

With no incisions, no chemicals and a quick turnaround time, its appeal to the nation's 76 million aging baby boomers is obvious. Even Oprah showcased the approach last year, while CBS recently featured Bassin in

a 2 1/2-minute segment on the procedure.

Melbourne resident Susan Gardner said she chose Thermacool over traditional plastic surgery after carefully researching the subject, talking to a woman who had it done and listening to Bassin at one of his seminars.

"Basically, I chickened out of surgery," because of the risks, she said.

And while she is pleased with the early results with Thermacool, she described the procedure as "uncomfortable."

"Yes, you do feel the heat underneath the cold," she said, despite two shots beforehand to numb her face. "There are certain places, like the cheeks, where there are just too many nerves."

Still, except for minor puffiness, Gardner has no complaints, and side effects are considered rare.

"You immediately see an instant lifting in the face," she said.

Bassin said he has treated "hundreds of patients" in the county so far.

Most, like Gardner, are between 40 and 60 years of age, with borderline changes - not too much wrinkling and not too much sagging.

"This is the best time to do it," he said.

And all of them have been women.

One reason: Men, literally, have thicker skins, "so it's harder to reach the collagen," Bassin said. ■

Susan Jenks, FLORIDA TODAY

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## Other cosmetic options for a more youthful face

Besides a full surgery facelift, which can cost as much as \$20,000, other cosmetic procedures for the face include:

**Filler substances:** These include two types of collagen and Restylane, a filler substance made from hyaluronic acid, a naturally occurring substance in the skin. Restylane recently was approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

**Botox:** Derived from a strain of botulism toxin, botox has been used to iron out the lines between the eyebrows and for isolated wrinkles on the forehead.

**Chemical peels:** Applied at

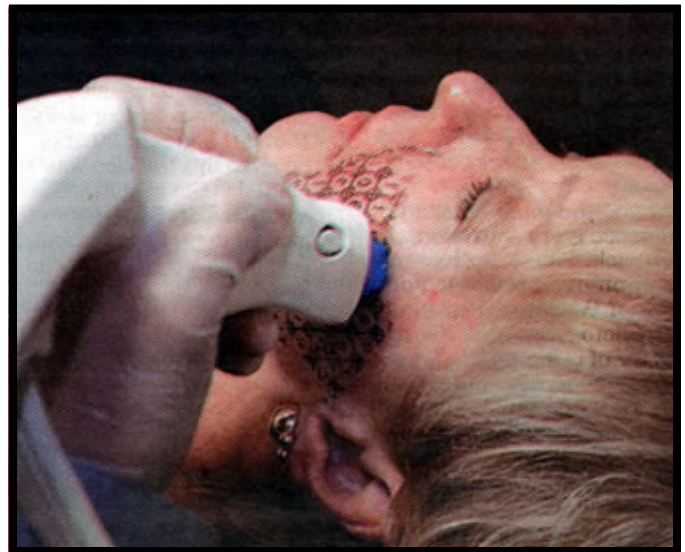
varying strength, chemical peels are used to restore wrinkled, blemished, unevenly pigmented or sun-damaged facial skin.

**Laser resurfacing:** Smoothing the face and fine wrinkles with several types of lasers, including the carbon-dioxide ultra-pulse laser.

**Dermabrasion:** Mechanical scraping of skin, using a high-speed rotary wheel.

**Liposuction:** The removal of exercise-resistant fat deposits with a tube and vacuum device, including liposuction to the chin and neck.

- American Society of Plastic Surgeons



**With precision.** Dr. Roger Bassin follows a grid on Susan Gardner's face to be treated with the Thermacool device. The technique can be used to treat acne or trauma scarring, but overwhelmingly it is used cosmetically.