

Plastic surgery getting a face-lift

By PAIGE WISER Sun-Times News Group

Maybe you wouldn't have noticed it. But it bothered Laura Garcia to no end: One of her earring holes was stretched out.

"I was wearing hoops back in the '90s, and I had my little cousin on my lap," Garcia said. Sure enough, he reached up and yanked on one as if it were a gym ring. "Months later I realized that my hole was not a perfect circle anymore." Over the past 10 years, it got worse.

The 30-year-old Garcia is a massage therapy student with a small budget, who lives in Pilsen. But now that plastic surgeons are offering cheaper and more inventive techniques, Garcia was able to repair her pet peeve. She had Restylane injected into her earlobe to correct any elongation. Within a year, she may need to do it again.

Plastic surgery used to be all about face-lifts, breast implants and nose jobs. But now, with patients like Garcia, doctors are focusing on the details: fine lines and imperfections that can be fixed quickly and relatively cheaply.

Despite the shaky economy, in 2007 there was an 8 percent increase overall in cosmetic surgical procedures. That's due to smaller procedures such as Botox injections.

Altogether last year, Americans spent \$13 billion on cosmetic procedures - \$8.3 billion for surgical and \$4.7 billion for nonsurgical.

Garcia understands why. Now that she's had a taste of plastic surgery, she's getting other ideas.

"I have a really round face," she said. "I know that Botox can give you more of a chiseled appearance. We'll see."

Local surgeons are seeing more people interested in minor procedures as well, due partly, they said, to cost and recovery time.

"In the office, we've noticed a significant increase in less invasive procedures," said Dr. John Bull, who practices at Edward Hospital in Naperville and runs his own plastic surgery practice as well. There's less down time for a minor procedure than a major procedure, he said.

Dr. Bahram Ghaderi of St. Charles Plastic Surgery agrees.

"If you have a family you can get something done in 10 minutes while your child is in school rather than take time off for a week," he said. "There's less discomfort, and it costs in the hundreds, rather than the thousands."

Neither doctor said people should expect the same level of improvement from a minor procedure vs. a major one, but said people see some improvement, and in many cases, that's enough.

"People want more preventative measures," Ghaderi said. "They want to prevent things rather than reverse them later, so in their 20s and 30s, they're interested in Botox and Restylane."

Along with the industry, patients' attitudes have changed, too. The clients of Dr. John Kotis used to avoid him in church, so as not to arouse any suspicion. But now the Arlington Heights plastic surgeon is greeted warmly wherever he goes.

"It's accepted to talk about your plastic surgery now," Kotis said.

There's a little show-and-tell, too.

"I have people in my waiting room flashing each other. It's truly amazing," he said.

Breast implants are still popular, of course, but there are more patients like Garcia. "There's plastic surgery for every part of the body," said Dr. Steven Dayan, author of *Instant Beauty: The Complete Consumer's Guide to the Best Nonsurgical Cosmetic Procedures*.

He feels particularly optimistic about the future of Botox. He is currently testing his theory that Botox reduces acne in clinical trials.

"Botox, in my opinion, is one of the safest products in all of medicine," Dayan said. "Aspirin can kill you quicker than Botox."

Overdoing plastic surgery isn't really a problem, according to these doctors. Ethical plastic surgeons do know how to say no and encourage their patients to have realistic expectations.

"I had a woman who came to me who wanted me to stack her breast implants," Kotis said. "She wanted to be so big that the company didn't make the size she wanted. I turned her down. But by golly, she found a plastic surgeon who would do it."

He saw her again, after the surgery.

"Her implants had shifted - one went up, one went down, and she had a straight line for a breast," he said.

That's why more patients are starting small.

"In general, plastic surgery has become more popular because it is more affordable due to increasing use of financing options," said Dr. Gregory Turowski, director of the New Horizons Center for Cosmetic Surgery in Skokie. "It is also more socially acceptable and safer than it used to be."