

Surgery at a

SIN TIP

Once the preserve of the rich and famous, cosmetic procedures are now available on the high street – and even in your living room. But at what risk to your health?

WORDS RUTH TIERNEY ILLUSTRATIONS GAVIN MCBAIN

Surgery is cheaper and more convenient than ever. So if you're one of the 10% of British women considering cosmetic surgery, you're spoilt for choice. Following the success of lunch-hour procedures, you can now order injectables to be administered at home in the same way you'd dial for a pizza. Some clinics even have a January sale. And they're finding clever marketing strategies to make the process ultra easy and affordable – Grattan offered customers mail-order procedures last year, before withdrawing the service amid controversy. And numerous websites are tempting potential patients with finance plans: fancy 'Liposuction from only £56 per month'?

Just as we crave quick-fixes when it comes to fashion – buying a handful of dresses from Primark, happily accepting they'll be in the charity-shop pile next season – we're viewing surgery as a temporary measure, too. Injectables by their nature are short-term,

lasting only a few months, but even the more invasive procedures seem no more undoable than a bad haircut, thanks in part to the spate of celebrity reversals. Tara Reid and Pamela Anderson have both had their breast implants removed, while Courtney Love has

had her nose job reworked, saying, 'I hated that nose. It was like a little beak.'

For Margo James*, 39, from London, Botox and fillers are as everyday as cleanser and toner. 'These treatments are now part of my beauty regime,' she says. 'Botox wears off after three months and filler after a year, so if you're not happy with the results, you're not stuck with them.'

Any place, any time

Surgery is now more widely available than ever – from anti-wrinkle treatment on the high street (pop into Superdrug in Milton Keynes or Brighton for some shampoo and

*Name has been changed



get your lines minimised while you're there) to Botox on a bike. The recent 'catalogue surgery' may have been met with outrage, but it isn't so different to the glossy brochures and hire-purchase-style finance agreements on offer through most major surgical chains.

'Botox by bike' is so called because a doctor from the London-based Botonics network of clinics makes house calls on his motorcycle. All you do is call up, place your order for Botox, filler or peels, and wait for your age-defying takeaway to be delivered. 'It appeals to two groups of clients,' says Botonics managing director Bill Green. 'The first are the time-poor, who are so busy with work and socialising they don't have time to travel to a clinic, wait for their treatment and trek home again. One client we regularly give Botox to is so busy, she can only see us at 11.30pm on a Friday night. Then there are the people who don't want to be seen to have had treatment, such as celebrities.'

Botox home deliveries have saved Anna Miles, 36, from London, from doing the post-injection walk of shame. 'I've had them twice now,' she says. 'I find it more soothing having the treatment with my home comforts around me, plus I don't have to worry about people seeing the needle pricks afterwards.'

But the trend is causing concern among industry experts. 'Selling cosmetic procedures in this way trivialises what is a serious medical treatment,' says Douglas McGeorge, president of the British Association Of Aesthetic Plastic

Surgeons (BAAPS). 'It's essential the public understands that aesthetic procedures are not commodities to buy off the shelf that they can later exchange for a different style or size. Side effects from injectables may be rare, but they do happen.' Nigel Mercer, BAAPS president-elect, is equally damning. By their very nature, the new marketing strategies define these treatments as easy-to-purchase impulse buys – undermining the seriousness of what is still a medical procedure,' he says.

Cut-price surgery

Although we're not quite at the stage where student surgeons are offering half-price ops as they are in the US, the pressure is on clinics to make surgery as affordable as possible. Thousands of Brits are adopting an 'operate now, pay later' approach to surgery – as borne out by a recent survey by Lloyds TSB, in which 10% of people questioned said they'd consider borrowing money to pay for a nip and tuck. Because of this, the bank no longer logs such loan requests under 'miscellaneous' but in a category of their own. Sainsbury's Bank has also seen an increase

'It'll take me years to clear the loan but I think it's worth it. I'd rather have new breasts than a new handbag each month'

in loan applications for cosmetic surgery – it estimates that £5 million per year has been used for this purpose in the UK. Ashley Ogilvie, 26, from Dundee, took out a loan with her bank to pay for a £4,000 boob job. A year later, she's still repaying the debt.

'It'll take me at least another two years to clear the loan but I think it's worth it,' she says. 'I'd rather have new breasts than a new handbag each month.'

The backlash

In response to what it views as the dangerous discounting and trivialisation of surgery, the surgical establishment is adopting its own marketing strategy to target those patients who might be tempted by the discounted, quick-fix options on offer. The Mybreast (www.mybreast.org) chain of surgeries offers affordable breast augmentation with BAAPS-accredited surgeons in the UK with the aim of deterring women from getting cheap surgery abroad, and is also marketing itself as an alternative to unscrupulous budget clinics in Britain. For breast implants, it charges an all-inclusive fee of £4,250, for which you get an overnight hospital stay and a lifetime follow-up policy, including →

