

SKIN FITNESS

THE RISE OF THE NON-SPA FACIAL

Forget the gym. Could a workout for your face be the secret to firmer, healthier-looking skin?

Pause the rainforest music. The new era of facials isn't about miracle creams or buzzy ingredients, but massage techniques that tone, sculpt and address skin health. It's wellness meets massage, with a big beauty pay-off – and we're here for it.

Mecca, naturally, is all over the zeitgeist. Their latest partnership with cult London brand FaceGym brings the brand's 'facial workouts' to Oz as a permanent offering in their George Street, Sydney flagship. Launched in 2014, FaceGym was responsible for skyrocketing facial massage into the mainstream with their barber-chair workouts – a combo of vigorous massage with devices like EMS (electrical muscle stimulation) and radio frequency.

Facial massage is of course not a new idea, but we're only now waking up to its beauty-related benefits. Valli Shubere, a phyto-dermal therapist and co-owner of Melbourne's Herbario Clinic, has been practising her signature technique – a combination of epidermal and intraoral massage alongside herbal remedies – for over 35 years. Her method is designed to “flush out harmful toxins, environmental pollutants, airborne bacteria and cosmetic overload, while releasing neuromuscular tension to regenerate the skin's eco-system”. Translation: it's a detox for your skin, helping to prevent accelerated ageing and increase skin resilience. After a treatment with Shubere, your skin feels alive with increased blood flow, has more tone and a smoother texture, and your jaw feels unlocked. Little wonder her waitlist is months long.

In a similar vein, buccal facial massage has been enjoying a moment in the spotlight, thanks to a certain former princess claiming it was her favourite treatment. The deep-tissue facial massage focuses mainly on the cheeks, with the manipulation happening inside your mouth. Leading Australian integrated facialist, April Brodie, explains that while a standard facial massage can improve the look of the skin through boosting circulation, buccal does much more. “It stimulates lymphatic and blood flow, enhances collagen and elastin production and tightens and lifts the muscles. By placing fingers both inside and outside the mouth, we can access the muscles and fascia



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much more precisely than by massaging on the surface alone.” Her loyal A-list clients know they'll emerge with a glowing facial structure that looks lifted and sculpted.

Brodie attributes buccal's growing popularity to the Meghan Markle effect, but also says the increase in pandemic-related stress levels has increased cases of clenching and grinding, so everyone needs jaw release.

The common thread with all these offerings is that they approach facials from a holistic point of view. Yes there is the superficial glow, but also tension relief, tone and a distinct lack of products doing the heavy lifting. The skill is in the hands of the aesthetician and the results aren't just marketing claims – they're in the mirror.

FACIAL MASSAGE FOR BEGINNERS

According to facialist April Brodie, the best thing you can do at home is a gua sha neck-release drill three times a week. “It's pointless doing your facial routine without including the neck,” she says. “All the muscles are interconnected.” Here's her favourite regimen:

STEP ONE

On cleansed skin, press 4-6 drops of face oil onto the face and neck.

STEP TWO

Using the curve of the gua sha (a flat tool made of semi-precious stone used to massage the face) and slightly firm pressure, cup it around your spine at the base of the neck and slowly pull up to the base of the skull. Repeat each stroke before moving laterally across.

STEP THREE

Gently work your way around the neck, starting from the base and moving up.

STEP FOUR

From the collarbone, stroke the gua sha tool slowly upwards to the jawline and gently over the curve of the jaw before stopping. If the skin is a little lax in this area, you can support it by using your fingers to gently stretch and support the skin of the cheek upwards while you complete this restorative step.

STEP FIVE

Swap over to the U-shaped edge of the gua sha tool and, using a feather-light touch, move it upwards over the throat to the chin.