

They're the eyes — the focal point of the face and the features that seem to speak most loudly and eloquently about a person's character and personality.

They're also a dead giveaway of a person's advancing age.

"As we get older, our eyelids and eyebrows start to droop, and those small wrinkles that appear between the eyes and on the outer corners when we frown or laugh become permanent — they're there even when we're not frowning or laughing," explains Dr. Fred Weksberg, a cosmetic dermatologist in Toronto. "So the eyes look smaller and more closed and you start to get this tired look."

Given the important role eyes play in how people project themselves and how they're perceived by others, it's not surprising that there are so many different methods of cosmetic enhancements targeting these facial features. And these methods are no longer restricted to everyday products such as eye cream and serums, or homemade remedies that include cold cucumber slices and previously steeped tea bags.

Today, Canadians have access to advanced and more effective procedures such as Botox Cosmetic injections, laser therapy, and plastic surgery. And thanks to makeover TV shows, extensive media coverage and the Internet, consumers have become more aware — and more accepting — of these sophisticated procedures.

"Cosmetic procedures have definitely become mainstream," says Ann Kaplan, president and

CEO of Mediacard Finance Inc., a Toronto company that provides financing for patients undergoing cosmetic procedures. "It's no longer the mysterious subject it once was and it's also become more affordable, making it accessible to more people, not just to the rich and elite."

Statistics suggest consumers who opt for cosmetic procedures are paying particular attention to their eyes. Eyelid surgery — also known as blepharoplasty — is among the top five cosmetic procedures, with 240,660 operations performed last year, according to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons.

A growing number of appearance-conscious consumers are also choosing laser surgery over eyeglasses or contact lenses to correct vision problems. Each year, about 700,000 people in the United States undergo laser-assisted in situ keratomileusis surgery — or LASIK for short — for eye conditions such as myopia (near-sightedness), hyperopia (far-sightedness), and astigmatism.

Dr. Avi Wallerstein, co-medical director at **LASIK MD**, a leading provider of laser vision correction in Canada, says his company's network of 20 clinics across the country treated close to 50,000 eyes last year, a number he expects to increase in the future.

"There's been a momentum building up in laser eye surgery in the last five years," says **Dr. Wallerstein**, who is also an assistant professor of ophthalmology. "People are saying 'why should I wear glasses when this procedure exists that

The eyes have it

Canadians have access to a range of cosmetic procedures, and many are also choosing laser surgery over glasses



Before treatment of crow's feet with Botox, and after the treatment.

has the potential to make me look and feel better?"

"Some people are really handicapped by wearing glasses or contact lenses, and laser eye surgery can result in a huge improvement in their quality of life."

The technology behind laser eye surgery has improved significantly in recent years, says **Dr. Wallerstein**. Advanced imaging provides greater detail of patients' cornea, allowing doctors to determine if they are good candidates for the procedure.

At the same time, highly sophisticated algorithms and software ensure greater precision during surgery

"In terms of performing the procedure, laser technology has become more precise and more custom-tailored to each individual's vision problem," says **Dr. Wallerstein**.

The cost of laser eye surgery starts as low as \$1,000 dollars for both eyes and depends on the patients' prescription says **Dr. Wallerstein**.

Cosmetic procedures for the

eyes have also become more precise in recent years, as practitioners have grown more adept with the technology and techniques at their disposal. And while surgery continues to be a popular option for those who want to improve the appearance of their eyes, the good news for consumers is that there are now a number of non-surgical procedures that can do wonders for their peepers. The injection of Botox and fillers such as Juvéderm is among these procedures. "Botox is a safe and effective product with a history that goes back more than 18 years and which has been used on over 16 million people in North America," says Dr. Weksberg. "It really is amazing how much you can improve the appearance of the eye area just by the strategic injection of Botox, perhaps supplemented by a filler like Juvéderm."

Botox is a purified protein that, when injected below the skin's surface, relaxes the muscles in the treated area. This in turn eliminates or reduces the wrinkles on the skin over those now-relaxed muscles.

The remaining wrinkles can then be smoothed out by injecting fillers.

"Using Botox, you can raise the eyebrows and make the eyes look more open," says Dr. Weksberg. "We do something here called a non-surgical brow lift where we inject BOTOX in the glabella — the little frown area between the eyebrows above the nose — and also in the tail area of the brow on both sides, where it relaxes the muscles that are pulling the eyebrows down."

Botox injected into the lower

eyelids can also give the eyes a widening, more youthful effect, says Dr. Weksberg.

For those with hollow areas under their eyes, an injection of fillers can transform them from tired-looking to refreshed.

"And the great thing with these procedures is that they can be done in less than half an hour," says Dr. Weksberg. "So you can come in on your lunch hour and go back to work right after."

The cost of Botox and filler injections varies from one doctor to another, with price tags ranging from as low as \$100 to as high as a few thousand dollars for extensive work.

But while Botox and filler injections can be done quickly, they still need to be administered by skilled and experienced hands, cautions Dr. Weksberg. He recommends that patients start by visiting www.FACEinstitute.ca, a website developed by an independent group of Canadian physicians and surgeons to help patients make well-informed decisions about cosmetic procedures. The site offers consumers the opportunity to get answers to their most common questions and the chance to try out a virtual cosmetic treatment with the 'Before and After Visualizer' by uploading a personal photo to see what they would look like after a treatment. The FACE Institute website also helps consumers locate a qualified doctor in their area. "It's important to see an experienced and expert specialist physician for this because you want the best result possible," says Dr. Weksberg. "This website is a good place to start looking."