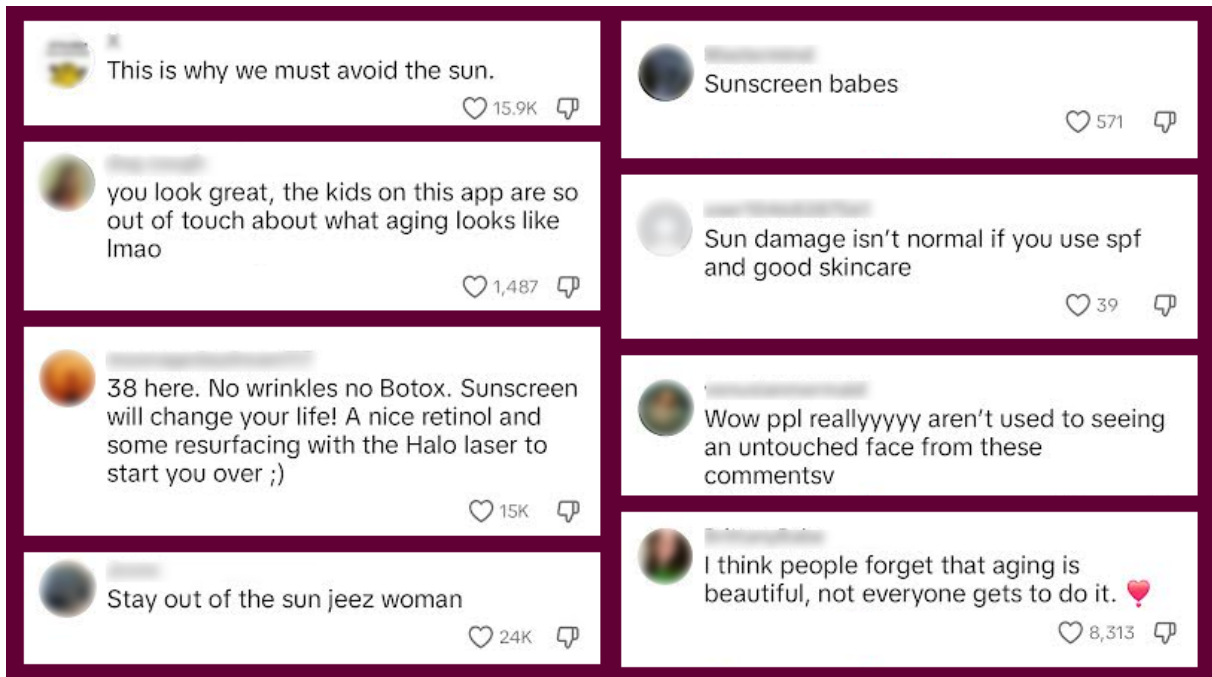


## Fad or a new normal? The rise in popularity of cosmetic procedures

The rise of social media has transformed the way women perceive themselves, by exposing them to various different definitions of beauty, but also by creating new sources of insecurity stemming from photo filters, airbrushing, and peer pressure leading many to chase the cycle of ever-changing beauty trends in the pursuit of “perfection”.

A recent TikTok trend saw women posting close-up videos of their faces, captioning them with variations of this statement: “this is what a 30-year-old face with no work done looks like”. While under most videos the comments were largely supportive of body-positivity, there was also a multitude of negative remarks, many of which encouraged the video creators to “fix their flaws”.



A 2022-23 House of Commons Committee report on the impact of body image on mental and physical health found that around 10% of adolescents and 13% of all women had considered cosmetic surgery, with social media and advertising as the leading causes of dissatisfaction with one’s appearance.

Exposure to unachievable ideals of beauty is driving people, particularly young women, to seek aesthetic procedures, with numerous news reports over the last few years discussing the increase in people under 30, and even adolescents, getting cosmetic procedures done.

Botulinum toxin, commonly known by its brand name Botox, is neurotoxic drug that stops a muscle from moving for a limited time. It’s frequently used to reduce facial wrinkles associated with ageing. Similarly, dermal filler is used to reduce the appearance of wrinkles, but it’s also used as a lip-enhancing injection. Both substances are non-surgical procedures used in the beauty industry, and both are referenced increasingly often on social media.

Lauren, 23, from London, is on her third round of Botox to reduce the appearance of forehead lines.

She said: “I had two faint permanent forehead lines which would be visible even when I wasn’t raising my eyebrows.

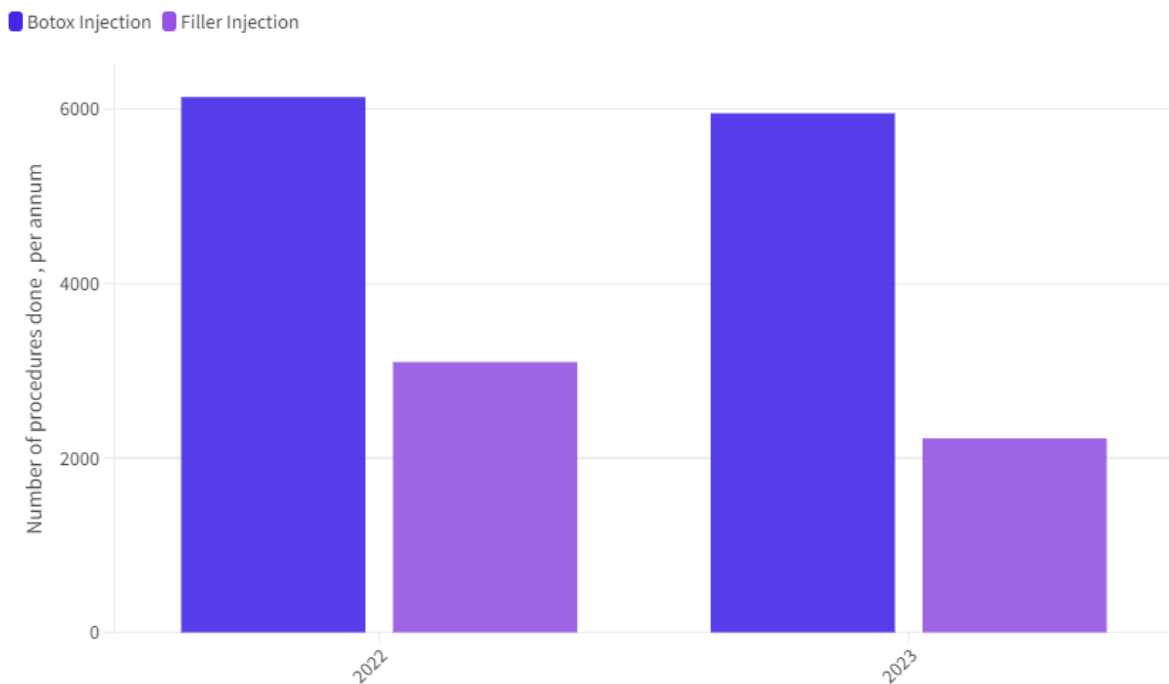
“In my eyes, it’s preventative work, rather than needing to do way more ‘damage control’ down the line, and spend way more to freeze much deeper, more visible lines by that point.

“I think, a gradual exposure of perfect, beautiful women my age and older with impeccable skin on my (social media) feed, but also in my friend circle, urged me to not fall behind and make sure I am doing the ground work so to speak for older me.”

Data from the British Association of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons (BAAPS) shows there were 5953 Botox and 2227 filler procedures in 2023, a decrease of around 3% and 28% since 2022, respectively.

Despite the decrease, in 2023, BAAPS reported that Botox was the most popular service among both surgical and non-surgical procedures.

### Women's annual non-surgical procedures



Source: BAAPS

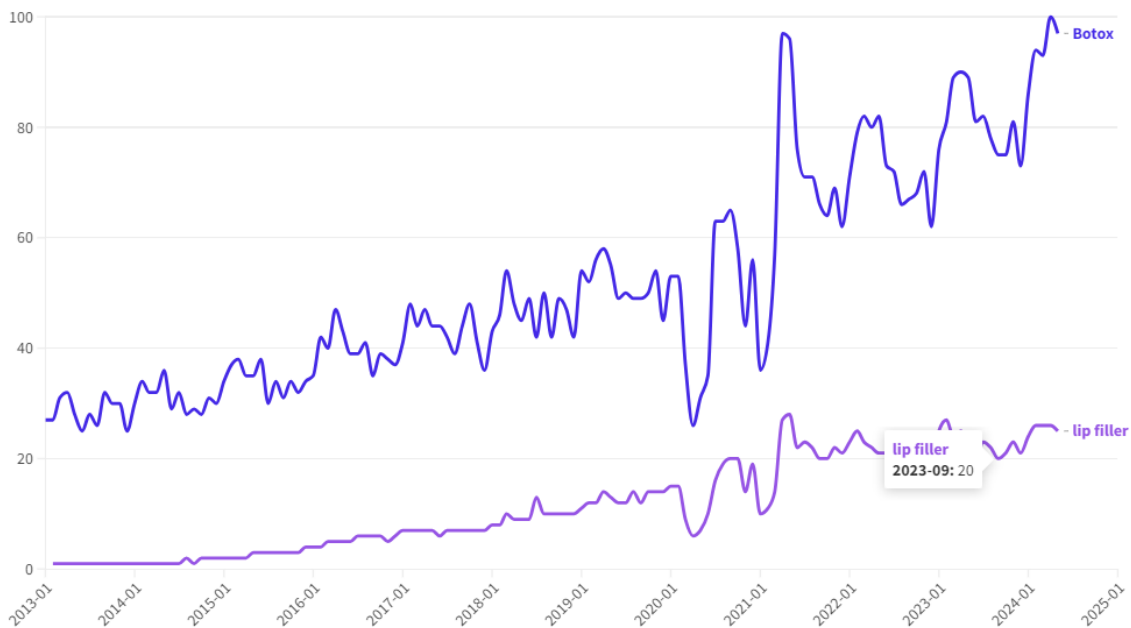
Due to a lack of data availability from earlier years, it’s difficult to be certain why Botox and filler procedures fell in 2023, but according to BAAPS, the decrease may be in line with an economic downturn and consumers seeking cheaper options with unregulated practitioners or abroad.

With an average price range of a Botox appointment between £100 and £350, it is generally the cheapest cosmetic service on the market which may also help explain why it has become the most popular procedure provided by BAAPS practitioners.

Despite a fall in procedures, web-search data from Google Trends shows that their popularity, at least in terms of online searches, is steadily growing.

The incidence of terms “Botox” and “lip filler” being searched over the last decade shows a general upward trend, with the only major downturns being due to the Covid pandemic.

### Google web-search popularity, UK 2013-2024



Source: Google Trends • 100 is the peak popularity for the term. A value of 50 means that the term is half as popular. A score of 0 means that there was not enough data for this term.

Lauren thinks that procedures like Botox are getting normalised and sees it as a positive thing. She said: “There’s less shame and more conversations about it now and I think it’s important to be open about it.

“As long as people do fillers and Botox from a relatively mentally healthy place, at an age where they are mentally capable of handling such procedures, and people properly research their administrators of such products and don’t cut corners on the product or administrator who is doing the work on them.”

The BAAPS data only accounts for Botox and filler procedures performed at clinics operated by members of BAAPS. These clinics are something of an outlier in the world of Botox and filler provision as their membership consists of highly qualified medical professionals.

Currently, there is no legislation in the UK that requires a minimum level of qualification to carry out Botox and dermal filler injections meaning many injections are carried out by unqualified individuals with little to no formal training. A particular risk when poorly conducted treatments can lead to serious consequences such as disfigurement, infection, and even death.

Ashton Collins, director of Save Face, a government-approved register for medical aesthetic treatments, said in a press release: “Practitioners who don’t invest in research, training, the environment they work in, care standards and protection should things go wrong are an accident waiting to happen.

“There are risks involved in non-surgical cosmetic procedures, and without the necessary safeguards in place, side effects and complications are more likely to occur.”

# Non-surgical cosmetic procedures



Did not have any pre-treatment consultation.



Almost four out of five patients were not asked anything about body image or psychological or emotional challenges.

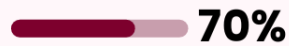


**“[There is an] overwhelming pressure on women, and more recently men, to conform to a particular beauty ideal that is portrayed by the media and magazines.”**

- The British Psychological Society

A recent survey found that 13% of women had considered cosmetic procedures, fillers, or Botox because of their body image.

Had a consultation that lasted less than 20 minutes.



Almost one in four were not asked about their previous medical history during their consultation.



1 in 10 UK adolescents have considered cosmetic procedures.



**“When performed appropriately, procedures can improve confidence, lessen the burden of mental health challenges, and improve individual wellbeing. Conversely, poorly performed procedures can add to these challenges on both an individual and a societal level.”**

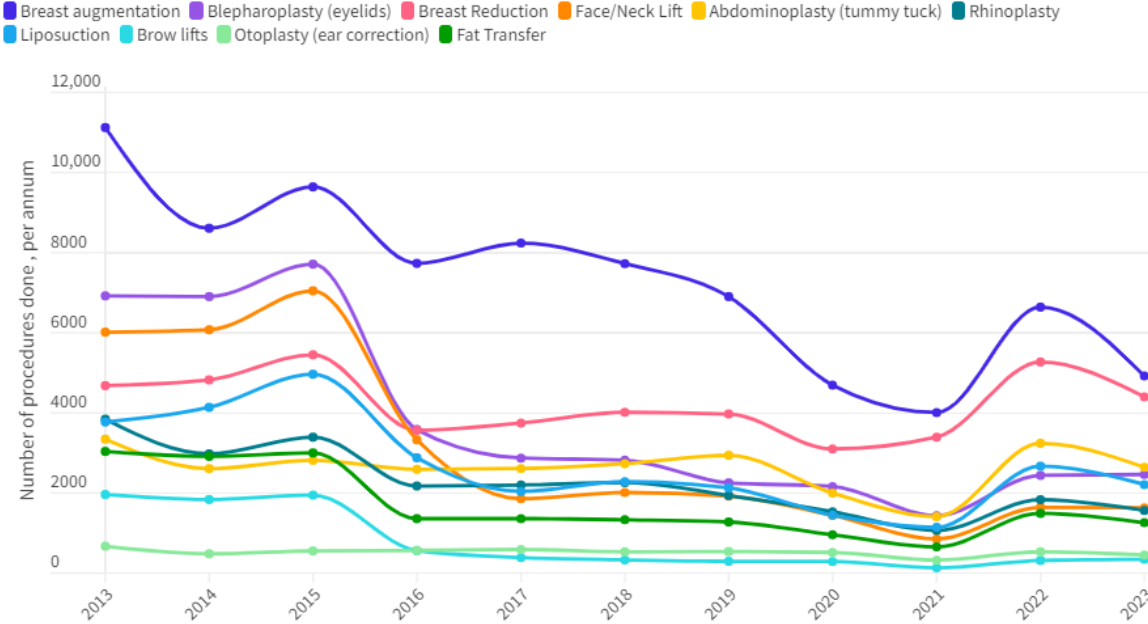
- Joint Council for Cosmetic Practitioners (JCCP)

Jessica, 24, had breast augmentation at 19 years old, and rhinoplasty (nose surgery) at 22. She had wanted the surgeries from a young age, and believes that exposure to social media had strongly influenced her choice to alter her body.

She said: "I hated the way I look. I still have moments of struggle, but I would have been a lot worse self-esteem wise if I hadn't got my work done. I hated my reflection too much. I tried so much to try and change that, cutting and dying my hair, losing weight, working out, lash extensions, excessive makeup. Nothing made me feel better."

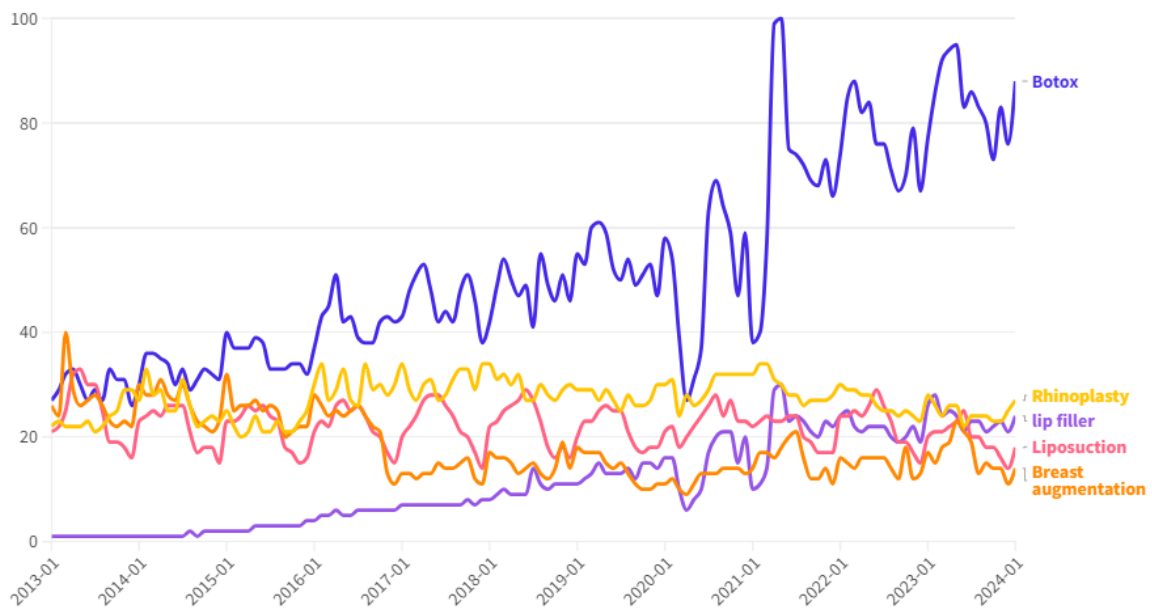
Like Botox and filler, most surgical procedures performed fell in 2023, but the appeal and demand are still there as Google Trends illustrates that interest in most procedures is on the rise.

### Women's annual surgical procedures



Source: BAAPS

## Botox vs other procedures



Source: Google Trends • 100 is the peak popularity for the term. A value of 50 means that the term is half as popular. A score of 0 means that there was not enough data for this term.

As social media continues to be an influential presence in modern society, its role in self-perception and the development of beauty standards is immense. Trends come and go, but some cosmetic procedures are here to stay, with Botox at the forefront of procedures becoming the new normal.

While some believe cosmetic enhancements to be empowering, normalising them comes with potential dangers that lurk within unregulated areas of the field which may be due significant reforms to ensure patients' safety.

Beauty standards shift with time, and what is considered "perfect" on social media today may quickly change, making the potential side-effects of cosmetic procedures a risk that ought to be weighed carefully.