

LOOK BEFORE/AFTER YOU LEAP

By Kuriko Kimura

It was an ordinary morning as I made my way to our Ginza clinic. I was rushing through the Miharabashi intersection beside the Kabukiza, with my hands full, when I suddenly fell flat, hit the ground and grazed my right cheek.

The heel of my right shoe must have caught in something like a gutter, sending me into that free fall. It was an awful, painful experience that brought home to me the words of wisdom ‘Look before you leap’ .

I regretted that I had been scurrying along with such high heels, but being short of stature, high heels are the crucial item to complete my daily outfit; I can't imagine life without them.

Later the same day, I was preparing for a patient requiring ‘Smart Liposuction’ , our clinic’ s special liposuction technique that utilizes a fat-dissolution laser. In the operation room, I told my younger brother, the anesthesiologist for the surgery, about my pitiful morning fall. He responded matter-of-factly and without hesitation, “ Yes, when you reach old age your reflexes fail. Watch out.” I was shocked to realize that my brother had begun to categorize me as an elderly person.

During the same week, my gym in Roppongi hosted an event featuring a familiar face, in fact a very famous Japanese journalist as the guest speaker. The journalist, a cancer survivor, recounted his reasons for joining the gym at over 70 years of age. He had become increasingly aware of his physical instability and loss of balance, particularly when he could come up with no excuse for tripping on his long-familiar corridor carpet in his home. As I listened, I could not help but think we were both in the same boat.

The gym’ s top personal trainer explained that to varying degrees, we all have innate motor skills. As children we naturally and sub-consciously become agile as we continuously use quick reflective movements that develop and make the most of these motor skills. However, as we grow older, there are fewer opportunities to use such skills and accordingly and unfortunately over time we lose our physical proficiency and locomotive ability. Therefore, tripping and falling are surely the signs of aging, which, regardless of situation, illustrate the incongruity, or lack of co-ordination between our mental imaging and actual physical movement. Taking this into account, it is important for us all to be conscious of ‘retrogression’ and to re-gain and guard against the complete loss of the natural abilities we once used instinctively and effectively.

When, for example, we watch the Olympic games on television, it is awe-inspiring to witness the seemingly impossible skill, speed and techniques with which the athletes perform. What makes possible such high performances is the athletes’ constant use of their innate motor skills which, of course, further develop and improve as they strive to reach the top of their chosen disciplines.

Regenerative Potential

Within the aesthetic medicine that I practice, there are already quite a lot of methods being used to recover or re-gain our 'rusty' functions. It may sound far-fetched but actually modern medical aesthetic treatments to restore youth and today's topical research like lighting regenerative medicine or tissue engineering are ultimately both classified as the "re-acquirement of human potential" .

When young and even if we carelessly become sunburnt or tanned, wrinkles and brown spots cause us no concern owing to our bodies' innate auto-repair system and prompt healthy skin replacement. Indeed, some decades ago, having a suntan was considered synonymous with health and vigour. However, as the glorious days of our twenties retreat into memory, we begin to notice the seriously unattractive accumulation of ultra violet ray damage. Brown spots and wrinkles become not only visible but also resilient due to the degeneration of our metabolism and slowed skin turnover. Looking closely at oneself in the mirror one may even feel the urge to 'scream' like in the famous Edvard Munch painting.

Perhaps while riding the subway, you have been surprised by your reflection in the train window, seeing unfamiliar exaggerated shadows and a darkening of your face. " Oh no, those prominent wrinkles are the nasolabial folds, correct? Oh, isn't that diagonal crease right in the front of the mid-cheek a nasojugal groove? Wait a minute.... " There is no time to observe and study all these signs of sagging skin: the proof that the regeneration of collagen production in the dermis (deep skin) cannot keep pace with the damage.

When one's skin becomes thin or loose, fat tissue can no longer be sustained high in the cheeks. With age and gravity, the buccal fat tissue gradually droops and the facial silhouette becomes flabby and jowly.

So how can aesthetic medicine treat wrinkles, brown spots and sagging of the face? There are many options available but the most popular for wrinkles and spots these days are Lasers and IPL (Intense Pulsed Light), neither of which cause major redness or swelling of the skin. To correct sagging skin, tightening machines utilizing infrared, RF (radio frequency) or ultrasonic waves are used.

To get rid of brown spots with the Laser or IPL, heat absorption is directed at only the melanin pigment and when a scab is formed, a foreign body reaction causes only the brown spots to be driven out of the skin.

By treating wrinkles and sagging skin with the same kind of methods, it is possible to stimulate and activate cells called fibroblasts that produce collagen and elastin and thereby revive and restore problematic areas. The upshot is that medical aesthetic treatments are producing something contrary to the mechanism of aging. How convenient the world has become! With the treatments now available, wrinkles, spots and sagging of the skin can be erased - rather like pressing the reset button on your computer.

With the ideas and innovation passed on by our predecessors, our generation has been provided with a base to build upon; after years of hard work and diligence, we are finally able to restore and prolong youth and beauty, albeit with an expenditure of time and money. There is no doubt that the industrially advanced countries are experiencing declining birth rates and increased aging populations. This is particularly apparent in Japan but, on the other hand, aesthetic and regenerative medicine is progressing in leaps and bounds and, in a sense, human beings are being ‘recycled’ and enabled to live longer and healthier.

To return to the condition of my grazed cheek upon which small scabs formed, eventually fell off and uncovered a new layer of skin. I continue to care daily for the area by using a skin-brightening topical cream to cure the post-inflammatory pigmentation and take highly concentrated Vitamin C and transamic acid. It goes without saying that looking before you leap in order to avoid mishaps and especially accidents is of critical importance, but so too is looking after you leap or, in other words, after-care and restoration.

As for the streets of Ginza, the intersection beside the Kabukiza thronging with traffic can be dangerous and requires attention and caution. Just the other day at this same location, I saw an elderly man strutting from the Ginza side of the cross section wearing a beret placed at a diagonal angle. As he drew a bit nearer, I realized that he was not wearing a beret at all, but a thin wig that had slipped to one side! He soon noticed the mishap and discreetly realigned his wig. I was so surprised that I couldn't help myself from staring at him. My heart exclaimed, “Hey, I could make your hair thick and abundant with regenerative aesthetic medicine. You should come to our clinic for a consultation.”

Upon deeper reflection, I thought perhaps everyone has a crucial thing that they love and without which they would feel incomplete. I am sure that gentleman's wig is as essential to him as my heels are to me. There is no need for us to give up such cherished items or habits – I still stride along Ginza with my high heels (although I have learned not to run with them) – as long as we ensure that we both **look before and after we leap.**