



Facial Yoga

Facial yoga's the new craze for losing wrinkles ... but be prepared to look ridiculous

By URSULA HIRSCHKOM - 6th February 2008

A wrinkled face is not a good look but as the years catch up with you, short of going under the knife there's no way to avoid it.

Or at least there wasn't, until a new set of facial exercises called face yoga promised to turn back the clock, returning your face to its smooth, youthful prime, without a scalpel in sight. Face yoga has already won devotees among the forever-young-looking celebrity crowd, with Gwyneth Paltrow and Jennifer Aniston said to be big fans. It's the brainchild of New York yoga teacher Annelise Hagen, who teaches it at the swanky New York Health & Racquet Club.



While I may not be physically blessed in every respect, the combination of a chubby face and a good dash of Oriental blood, courtesy of my father's Chinese ancestors, means I'm not too wrinkly at the ripe old age of 36.

But it's never too soon to start putting your face through its paces, and Hagen says that striking face yoga poses daily helps to keep your skin "more elastic, less saggy and deliver a more glowing, youthful complexion".

Well, I am not about to turn my nose up at the chance of taut, baby-soft skin for life, and fortunately for those who can't make her New York classes, she has brought out a book called *Yoga Face: Eliminate Wrinkles With The Ultimate Natural Facelift*, so we can all keep those wrinkles at bay.

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There's no set routine to face yoga as you can do ten minutes a day to target specific areas, or an hour-long anti-ageing routine once a week, topped up with ten-minute sessions when you moisturise your face at night.

Either way she promises fast results, with sags smoothed away and lines ironed out within three weeks. Too good to be true? There was only one way to find out.

After squinting away at Hagen's instructions - surely not good for those creeping crow's feet - I'm ready to put face yoga to the test.

There are dozens of exercises in the book, and I can't wait to try out the intriguing sounding Lion Face and Satchmo. Given my propensity towards a chubby chin, I decide to kick off with Bumblebees, as this targets the cheeks, lips and jaw muscles.

I'm hoping for an instant retraction of that extra chin, as I try to follow the directions to chew, exhale and emit a low hum all at the same time.

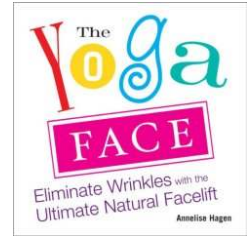
Just to make things even more complicated, the book says mentally repeating the word 'why' as you do all this "can be especially cathartic".

I concur.

<p>MARI'N</p>  <p>THIS keeps lips strong. Keep your brow smooth and blow kisses. Repeat four times. Then press lips to your first two fingers. Repeat three or four times.</p>	<p>SURPRISE ME</p>  <p>THIS exercise smooths your wrinkled brow. Widen your eyes without wrinkling your brow, then focus on a point on the horizon for five to ten seconds. Repeat four times.</p>
<p>SMILING FISH FACE</p>  <p>FIRM and tone your cheeks and lips. Smile while slightly pursing your lips. Withdraw and pinch your cheeks into the hollows of your face as you do so. Repeat five times.</p>	<p>PUPPET FACE</p>  <p>LIFT lines between your nose and lips. Smile and press your fingertips into the crease between lips and nose. Lift muscles up and press fingertips on the area for resistance. Repeat 20-30 times.</p>
<p>LION FACE</p>  <p>LION Face stretches facial muscles and releases tension. Inhale through nose, make fists and squeeze face muscles. Exhale through mouth, stick out tongue, roll eyes and open hands. Repeat three times.</p>	<p>BUMBLEBEES</p>  <p>WORKS cheeks, lips and jaw. Inhale through nose and make a chewing sound. Vibrate the sound 'mmm' through nose as you exhale and chew. Repeat for four breaths.</p>



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Why am I sitting here, looking a fool as I jibber away in the faint hope this will do away with my excess chin, rather than opting for the more traditional method of saying no to chocolate? Still, a swift look at Hagen's pert blonde face hardens my resolve to follow her lead, though I am slightly perturbed by what look suspiciously like rather deep lines around her smiley green eyes - but perhaps it's just because she's pulling such a silly face in the picture.

As Valentine's Day is just around the corner, I move on to the Marilyn; named after Ms Monroe. This is designed to create stronger, firmer (and I'm hoping more kissable) lips. It involves throwing kisses as you 'visualise throngs of admiring fans' - not too much of a stretch of the imagination for an egomaniac like me. After a few minutes of puckering up at my reflection, I feel more like a goldfish than a glamour girl.

I don't want to strain my lips before Valentine's Day, so it's on to the Satchmo. This exercise pays homage to trumpeter Louis Armstrong and is designed to strengthen the same muscles used when playing this instrument to ensure your cheeks stay pert and perky. The photo of Hagen with eyes bulging and cheeks puffed out isn't a pretty sight, and as I copy her puffing up each cheek in turn, I pray no one walks in - they'd be dialling 999 at the sight of my breathless, red-faced panting.

Time for the more soothing sounding Sphinx Smile. This is meant to do away with those smile lines that etch their way around all but the most miserable people's mouths. The aim of the exercise seems to be recreating the dead-eyed smile of a bored receptionist, lifting the corners of your mouth, but keeping your eyes glassy and cold as a doll's. Apparently, if you keep this exercise up long enough you will re-train your smile to look this way all the time.

This may mean no lines, but it also means never flashing anyone a genuine grin again. If that's the trade-off, I say bring on the Botox. Feeling rather grumpy at this attempt to rid me of my sunny smile, I am ready to work off a bit of aggression with the Lion Face.

It sounds perfect as it "releases emotional tension" and works out all the muscles in your face. Pulling off the combination of balling my fists, squeezing my facial muscles, sticking out my tongue and rolling my eyes means I forget that other key element - breathing.



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Once I've revived myself from near asphyxiation, I do feel more relaxed.

Perhaps it's because the oxygen is returning to my brain, but it might be because pulling funny faces makes me feel young again.

Not because my skin has snapped back into shape, but because it takes me back to when I'd make silly faces behind the teacher's back at primary school.

After an hour of pulling the Satchmo and the Sphinx Smile, my face is glowing, though I am not convinced it's down to a newfound youthful vitality.

I think instead it's the embarrassment at having been made to look such a fool - even if it was in front of my own reflection.

Yoga Face: Eliminate Wrinkles With The Ultimate Natural Facelift by Annelise Hagen
available from www.amazon.co.uk for £6.99

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"Don't humans go to extraordinary lengths to look great?!"



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