

SHAPE

A full-page photograph of actress Jessica Chastain. She is sitting on a grey, textured surface, leaning back on her right hand. She has long, wavy red hair and is smiling at the camera. She is wearing a bright yellow, long-sleeved, off-the-shoulder dress with a ribbed texture. Her legs are crossed at the ankles, and she is wearing bright pink high-heeled pumps. She has a small pink earring and a gold bangle on her right wrist.

**JESSICA
CHASTAIN**

What Drives
Her Passions

**REFRESHING
WINTER
WORKOUTS**

YOUR
PLAN FOR
**GLOWY
SKIN**

**Let's
Go!**

IT'S TIME TO
BE BOLD

Firm Plans

The next frontier in dermatology: treatments that tighten lax, saggy, or crepey skin. After a long wait and a lot of research, we now have promising breakthroughs.

For wrinkles, there's Botox. For age spots, peels or lasers. But when it comes to the tricky issue of addressing loose, saggy skin, doctors haven't had a proven go-to. "Plenty of devices can help with texture, fine lines, and scarring, but they won't necessarily restore your skin's bounce," says Shereene Idriss, M.D., a cosmetic dermatologist in New York. Now, however, there are exciting new developments. Tightening the skin requires technology that goes deeper than your typical at-home skin-care treatment. "Finally, we've found a way to do that without incurring scars or a lot of downtime," Dr. Idriss says.

WHAT CAUSES SKIN LAXITY

Think of a baby's bouncy cheeks. Under the surface, there are layers of soft collagen and lots of elastic fibers set up in a strong scaffolding-like structure that supports skin. "Over time, the elastin begins to break down, mostly because of sun exposure, lack of sleep, pollution, lifestyle choices like smoking or drinking, and genetics," Dr. Idriss says. Even if you avoid all those things, you lose 1 percent of collagen each year once you pass your mid-20s. As collagen and elastin decrease, saggy skin appears, especially in the jowls, neck, décolletage, stomach, arms, and knees, says Amelia K. Hausauer, M.D., a dermatologist in California. This same laxity is also common after significant weight loss, like postpartum.

WHAT A DERM CAN DO

"Surgery used to be the only way to get rid of sagging skin. It is still the most definitive way to treat these problems, but it can leave long, visible scars, especially on areas like the arms and legs. Now there are great nonsurgical ways to address laxity," Dr. Hausauer says. Her go-to treatment is the Profound device (about \$4,000), which is a combination of microneedling and radio frequency energy used on the face and body. "This particular energy emits heat that causes skin to rev up elastin and collagen production. The microneedling helps the radio frequency reach into the deeper layers," she says. It's painful, so Dr. Hausauer injects a numbing medication first. Expect a week or more of swelling and bruising. "You'll see the final results in three to six months or longer. Typically, after one session, you'll experience about one-third of the tightening you'd get from a face or body lift," Dr. Hausauer says. Another new option that doesn't involve needles is Evoke (about \$3,000 for three sessions), which emits radio frequency energy from a device that straps onto your cheek, jawline, and neck area. "You'll feel a warming sensation, similar to a hot stone massage," says facial plastic surgeon Yael Halaas, M.D. "After three sessions, some patients see results similar to Profound."

Dr. Idriss likes to tighten skin with ultrasound energy from a device called Ultherapy (about \$2,600). "This heats the tissue and causes a contraction within the fibers," she says. "It actually remodels the tissue and encourages the body to produce more elastin and collagen over time." The procedure takes 20 minutes to an hour, depending on the area you're treating, and can feel very hot, so Dr. Idriss uses topical numbing cream ahead of time. You may look red or flushed from the heat right after the treatment, but there is no visible downtime, just soreness and tenderness for about two weeks.

Lastly, biostimulatory fillers are the latest firming option to excite dermatologists. They inject hyperdiluted Radiesse or Sculptra (price starts at \$1,000) into saggy areas like the neck, chest, knees, upper arms, and abdomen, not to plump them up but to help your body build elastin and collagen around them. "We inject these fillers in the shape of tiny threads that act like a stake for the fibers," Dr. Hausauer says. The filler dissolves over the course of a year, at which time your new elastin and collagen are firmly in place.

Finding the right options for you will depend on body chemistry, so you'll want to discuss them with your doctor. "These treatments tend to work better for patients who have moderate skin laxity," Dr. Hausauer says. "The sooner you start [when you first notice loose skin], the more successful they are," she says.

HOW SKIN CARE PITCHES IN

There's no serum that tightens as well as Spanx, but a combination of topical options can help. Sunscreen and vitamin C fight the damaging oxidative stress that comes from things like UV light and pollution, ensuring that your skin won't lose as much elastin as it would otherwise. Try Obagi Clinical Vitamin C Suncare Broad Spectrum SPF 30 Sunscreen (\$58, [sephora.com](https://www.sephora.com)), which has both protective ingredients.

Other topicals take a proactive approach, acting like a cleaning crew inside your skin. "Research shows that retinoids can clear out damaged cells and improve collagen production," Dr. Hausauer says. Try Neutrogena Rapid Wrinkle Repair Retinol Oil (\$29, drugstores). Excitingly, certain peptides (found in Alastin Skincare Restorative Skin Complex, \$195, [alastin.com](https://www.alastin.com)) can direct the body to target and remove the old, damaged elastin and collagen, Dr. Hausauer says. "That action sends a signal to your skin to generate new collagen and elastin fibers, resulting in more bounce overall," she says.