

## FORTUNE Well.

**Jennifer Lopez and Meghan Markle have made mouth massages popular. But do they really reduce jaw pain and fine lines?**

Kristine Gill | April 1, 2023



GETTY IMAGES

Cassie Milam's dentist told her that without a night guard she ran the risk of grinding her teeth to a pulp. While the guard prevented damage from her TMJ (temporomandibular joint disorders), they didn't alleviate the tension or pain in her jaw. But the 37-year-old mother of four learned about a new, sort of bizarre facial massage that did the trick.

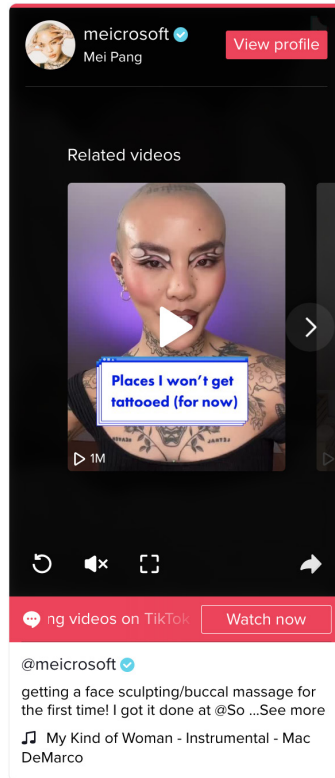
Milam found a spa in Houston where an esthetician would massage her mouth from the inside out.

Buccal massages, popularized by the likes of Jennifer Lopez and Meghan Markle, are also getting a lot of attention on TikTok where influencers share videos of themselves getting the treatment or promote a DIY method promising everything from pain relief to anti-aging effects and face sculpting over time.

Milam now goes monthly to ease her jaw tension.

But how does buccal massage work and where can you get one done professionally? These experts explain.

## The buccal massage experience



SHUTTERSTOCK

The first time Milam got her massage, she was a bit taken back by the sensation. She knew the treatment would involve having hands in her mouth, but she wasn't prepared for how that felt.

"At first I was like what do I do with my tongue? What if I get drooly? But it just feels so good," Milam says. "Even without jaw pain, with the tension you hold in your cheeks and face, it's the greatest thing."

On top of it, her dentist approves. He sent Milam home with a mouth guard but said that since the stress causing her teeth grinding (likely the result of life as a mom of four) isn't going to subside soon, massages might be a good alternative.

"I'm trying to avoid injectables for as long as possible and I feel like what she does has helped so much for my fine lines and the lymphatic massage has made my jawline slimmer," Milam said.

Milam's esthetician, Katia Moreno, owner of Katia's European Spa in Houston, Texas, began with a facial cleansing and a lymphatic drainage massage all done with medical grade gloves before entering the mouth for the full buccal massage.

Moreno uses non-comedogenic oils which allow her hands to glide over the skin without clogging pores. After the massage, she cleanses the skin a second time and introduces a hot towel and enzymes for added treatments if requested by the client.

Moreno, who dubs herself a buccal massage expert on Instagram, put in nearly 80 hours of training in Ukraine to learn all about lymphatic draining and facial muscles. While it originated in France, Moreno said the massage gained popularity in the last few years and now accounts for about 90% of her appointments.

Moreno says many of her clients have found they can delay the need for Botox and fillers by getting regular buccal massages, which she says sculpt and rejuvenate the face. She even says these clients have noticed other benefits, including less frequent migraines and relief from TMJ.

Moreno's massage starts at about \$220 and lasts for an hour.

Danna Lu Davis, is a licensed esthetician who offers the massage at her spa in Bethesda, Maryland. She says it's also her most popular offering. Davis' buccal facial lasts 25 minutes and costs \$50. A 70-minute option with gua sha runs \$160.

Davis' client Grace Kishna, 71, has been coming to her for this massage since July 2021 and said it's helped to improve the side effects of Bell's Palsy, which paralyzed one side of her face in 2018. Acupuncture helped for some time before Kishna found Di Di's Facial Spa.

"When I first went to her I didn't have much movement on that side of my mouth," she said, "and now there's movement."

## The science behind buccal massage

Like all types of massage, working the facial muscles can relieve tension and pain, and offer a relaxing experience.

And lymphatic drainage works by moving fluids, known as lymph, under the skin to various lymph nodes where it's returned to the body's cardiovascular system, reducing swelling in the face and other parts of the body.

So it makes sense that these massages offer some relief of muscle pain and a more slim look in the face, says [Dr. Kimberly Lee](#) a board-certified facial plastic and reconstructive surgeon at Beverly Hills Facial Plastic Surgery Center.

"Where it falls short is that this is a temporary thing," she adds. "So it's not like you get the buccal facial massage and then you're told your whole face is sculpted forever, or you have tension that's released forever."

A permanent solution for those looking to slim the buccal area of the face would be to have that fat removed, Dr. Kimberly Lee says, through an outpatient procedure that yields permanent results.

As far as anti-aging, Botox might be more effective at reducing wrinkles and migraine symptoms, says Dr. Heather Lee, a double board-certified facial plastic surgeon at The Quatela Center for Plastic Surgery.

Dr. Heather Lee points out that buccal fat is a fat pad that sits deep in the face and contributes to what she calls a "youthful, cherubic look." But the trend these days is for a more sculpted face, so

many women seek to have that fat removed or reduced. A buccal massage won't remove fat and can't really reshape the buccinator muscle.

Dr. Heather Lee agrees with Dr. Kimberly Lee in the sense that these massages might offer short-term benefits specifically when it comes to lymphatic drainage that results, offering a temporary reduction in that puffiness in the face and jaw.

### **Can you do it yourself?**

Without a deep understanding of how these facial muscles work, estheticians don't suggest doing it yourself.

"You could do a little part of this yourself, but you can't really affect those deep muscles," Moreno said.

But unlike less savory online trends—you don't run a huge health risk by attempting this one. Keep in mind that because you're massaging from inside your mouth, you'll want to make sure your hands are cleaned before and after.

"If you think about those Listerine commercials, there's a lot of bacteria in our digestive tracts," says Dr. Kimberly Lee.

You might experience a little relief, but if you want the full effect, see a professional.

<https://fortune.com/well/2023/04/01/does-buccal-massage-reduce-pain-fine-lines/>