**The fountain of youth**

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My girlfriends keep reminding me that having entered the 40s and gradually heading towards the frightening 50s, where apparently I will officially hit the bracket of, ‘old age’ and can no longer call myself middle aged, (although according to google I can), the only way to slow this process down is to hit the nearest dermatologist clinic.  
When I took the risk of reminding my lovelies, (in an inaudible whisper) that it would not change their age on their birth certificate, they were shocked and raised their eyebrows (that did not rise due to botox), and I was given a lecture on, ‘looks matter Zara’, ‘do not ever tell anyone your real age,’ ‘it’s self-care’ and so on.  
For starters, in the name of breaking stereotypes and shocking them even more, (I think I like creating an impact), I confess that I am turning forty-five this year and my dear girlfriends are as old as me if not older by a few months. I just killed my social life for the next few months after they read this, but who cares!  
On a serious note, what is the obsession women have with taking a dip in the fountain of youth to be looking younger? Why is it necessary that our skin should not have wrinkles, fine lines, signs of sagging, and a hanging double chin? Who set these unrealistic expectations that a woman needs to permanently look young and should try every trick in the book from putting tea bags on her eyes to getting her face injected with painful needles?  
Why are white-haired men with wrinkles and facial lines considered distinguished-looking and more attractive (so, George Clooney of them) whereas women who do not employ anti-aging strategies are called haggard, unattractive, and grossly judged for it that it almost feels as if aging is something they could have prevented and should be reprimanded for.  
Do you know that the anti-aging market revenue is estimated to hit $412.4 billion by 2030?  
For the love of God, why? Why would we invest so much money to challenge the organic cycle of life? Who are we doing this for? Why do we put ourselves through painful skin treatments to look how we did in our youth? What difference does looking young make in our lives? These are all questions that women need to ask before they book their next appointment with the dermatologist.  
What alarms me is how many anti-aging procedures have gone wrong and more importantly, the negligible difference they make. Continuing to take the risk of further alienating my girl-friends, in all honesty, I have not been able to see much of a difference in how they look even after getting skin PRP, botox injections, vampire facials, and so on for the face and I can bet there are several for the body too which I am not familiar with. Vampire facial? Wow.  
Am I judging women who go for these treatments? I think it is partly true. Partly, I am just curious at this pressure women put themselves through to look youthful. I want to call it a collective trauma that originated with perhaps a faint idea somewhere someday in history when a woman was probably questioned over how old she looked and she must have wondered how she could fix it.  
Is it to please the men; our spouses and partners, to make our relationships safe and prevent the men from falling for a younger woman? That’s part of it, isn’t it? Or is it a competition with other women, where, looking better and younger will win us some imaginary trophy?  
We and only we can stop this. Be uncomfortable and tell your age next time someone asks you. Don’t hide your wrinkles with expensive concealers. Let that lonely strand of white hair be if it has been missed by your stylist. Self-care is self-acceptance. Try to be real and to embrace who we are, with our heads held high and a wrinkly smile on our faces. Work out, eat well, invest in your mental health, and enjoy being who you are.  
Age is just a number for crying out aloud. For me, my 40s are the beginning of the best era of my life and every wrinkle on my face is a sign of a life fully lived. Good and bad experiences combined. I do want to fix my double chin though…just kidding!  
I like what Jamie Lee Curtis said, ‘I want to age with intelligence, and grace and dignity, and verve, and energy. I don’t want to hide from it.’  
Let’s replace anti-aging with pro-aging!