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Lush life for lashes

Latisse is an FDA-approved treatment for women who want long and full eyelashes

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STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. – Deborah Bencivenga believes the eyes are the windows to the soul, and eyelashes may just be the windowsill.

The 44-year-old Eltingville resident never had problems with her lashes, which filled out nicely when she wore mascara. But in late December, she had an itch to try something new and decided to get eyelash extensions, which are applied by gluing false lashes to your own. After a little more than a month, she believes the extensions weakened her own lashes, causing them to fall out.

“I feel like eyelashes really enhance your eyes and I never didn’t have them before,” Mrs. Bencivenga said. “I felt like I was going to be bald.”

She read an article about actress Jenny McCarthy using the first FDA-approved treatment for natural eyelash growth called Latisse. In February, Mrs. Bencivenga visited New Dorp plastic surgeon Dr. John Decorato, who gave her a prescription for the product manufactured by Irvine, Calif.-based Allergan.

Latisse was OK’d by the FDA in late December for eyelash hypotrichosis (a fancy way of saying having inadequate or not enough lashes). Allergan spokeswoman Caroline Van Hove said there has been a need for a safe and effective eyelash enhancement product on the market for some time.

The idea for Latisse came about during clinical trials for Lumigan, a glaucoma drug also manufactured by Allergan, Ms. Van Hove explained. The company noticed that patients using the eye drop solution started experiencing eyelash growth. Latisse is the same solution, but is used in a smaller amount and applied to the eyelid instead of the eye.

“It’s interesting,” said Dr. Andrea Thau, a spokeswoman for the American Optometric Association, “It’s the difference between using a drug for its originally intended effects and benefiting from its unintended effect.”

Dr. Thau, associate clinical professor at the SUNY State College of Optometry in Manhattan, explained that Lumigan has proven to be a safe and effective treatment for controlling intraocular pressure in glaucoma patients. However,

there can be some side effects to Lumigan, including darkening of the iris and eyelid skin.

Ms. Van Hove noted that the most commonly reported side effects of Latisse are eye redness, itchy eyes and skin hyperpigmentation, which occur in less than 4 percent of users. Iris pigmentation has not been seen in Latisse users, but people should be aware of its potential. She noted that people with ocular infections, an active eyelid disease or irritated skin around the eyelids, should speak to their doctor before using Latisse.

Overall, Dr. Thau said, “For most patients, it will be a safe option [for eyelash growth].”

Since Latisse was approved, Dr. Decorato has had several patients begin using it. “People with longer eyelashes, their eye looks brighter, they frame their eye better,” he commented.

He explained that Latisse should only be applied to the upper eyelid once a day at night. Just one drop is placed on an applicator and is wiped across the hair follicles of the eyelid. A separate applicator is used for the other eye. The treatment costs about \$120 for a 30-day supply, including 60 applicators.

Dr. Decorato noted that his patients began seeing a difference in four weeks, although to get the optimal effect it takes 16 weeks. After that, the treatment should be applied two or three times a week for maintenance.

According to Ms. Van Hove, after four months, a study group of Latisse users had a 25 percent increase in length, 18 percent increase in darkness, and 106 percent increase in fullness.

About 12 weeks after starting Latisse treatment, Mrs. Bencivenga was already happy with her eyelashes. “I really have to say, they grew so fast,” she said.

Another perk, and one that the mother of an active 2 1/2-year-old daughter really appreciates, is that she no longer has to apply mascara.

“Long luscious lashes are beautiful,” said Mrs. Bencivenga. “They’re one of the first things you notice on a person.”

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