

FACIAL GLOW

Sydney cosmetic physician **DR SHARRON PHILLIPSON** explained laser resurfacing to Holly O'Neill.

Lasers can be used for many different purposes. As well as having a role in surgical procedures as cutting tools, they are also a useful tool for rejuvenating the skin. They can be used to minimise acne scars, deep wrinkles, freckles, moles, tattoos, age spots, blemishes, and even to restore a glow to dull, aged skin. It takes more than one laser to perform all of these functions. "The CO2 and the Erbium laser are both used for resurfacing the skin," explains Dr Sharron Phillipson.

A difference between the Erbium and CO2 lasers is the effect on the skin. "People ask for the Erbium laser because the promotion has been that it's quicker healing and less traumatic on the skin, with less collateral damage and redness," explains Dr Phillipson. On the other hand you may get problems with bleeding during surgery. Erbium laser just removes the tissue, unlike the CO2 laser which also coagulates the blood vessels, so deeper passes can be made without the problem of bleeding.

This means that the lasers should be used for different purposes. Having two lasers also allows a combination of both to be used on one person. An example of this would be for acne scarring. The whole face may be treated with an Erbium laser, then the CO2 laser may be used to go back and treat the areas of scarring on the cheeks. During the consultation Dr Phillipson makes a clinical decision of which laser to use, or whether to use a combination of both.

The procedure for an Erbium or CO2 laser resurfacing is very similar. Patients are given a light sedation so they are comfortable and then the face is anaesthetised with blocks. Once the face is numb the operator will then flash the laser over the face and gently remove the outer layer of skin.

"Once the outer later of skin is removed the face has to heal and there are two things that happen," explains Dr Phillipson. "One is with ablation you remove a lot of the pigmentation problems, freckles, blemishes and flatten out the acne scarring. The other is that when the skin regenerates it regenerates the new collagen, so the skin is tighter, healthier and younger looking."

It generally takes the patient about 7 days before they have recovered enough to go out in public (with camouflage makeup on). Originally it was thought that a treatment with Erbium allowed a faster healing time than with CO2, in reality it is fairly similar. Redness can persist for 6-8 weeks after a CO2 treatment, 4-6 after an Erbium treatment.

There are a few possible complications associated with laser resurfacing. These include hyperpigmentation, hypopigmentation, prolonged redness and scarring. The other complication that can occur is, because the outer layer of skin is removed, the patient may be prone to infection. Dr Phillipson always prescribes antibiotics to minimise this risk.



BEFORE

AFTER laser resurfacing

THE PHOTODERM MACHINE

Dr Phillipson also uses the Photoderm machine. Although not actually a laser it works in the same way a laser does and can be used for a variety of purposes. Instead of emitting one wavelength it emits a range of wavelengths and has a filter to omit the wavelengths that aren't needed.

"It has a wide parameter of use," says Dr Phillipson. The most common procedure it is used for is for telangiectasia, small blood vessels on the face. It can also be used for age spots on the hands, benign lesions on the skin, freckles, moles, it can even be used for hair removal.

"Photoderm is a very straightforward procedure," explains Dr Phillipson. No sedation or anaesthesia is used. A cold gel is placed on the patient's face. The particular parameters for the patient's skin type is determined by the doctor and put into the computer in the system. Basically then a light is flashed onto the skin that selectively destroys pigment without damaging the skin. "It is very effective," says Dr Phillipson.

Afterwards the patient's skin is a bit red and they may experience a slight stinging. In the treatment of blood vessels, they may disappear immediately or it may take 2-3 weeks.

Common Questions about Laser Resurfacing

How long does a laser peel take?

A laser peel of the upper lip takes a few minutes. To do the whole face generally takes thirty minutes to several hours, depending on the anaesthetic, and the severity of the wrinkles or scars.

How painful is the procedure?

Pain medications, sedatives, or local or general anaesthetics are usually given to make the procedure comfortable. After the laser peel there is very little pain for most patients.

How can I prepare for a laser peel?

Your doctor may recommend the use of glycolic-acid products. Skin-lightening products will help to condition the skin and suppress pigment blotches, which frequently appear from hormones and sun exposure. Normally, 2-3 weeks of skin

preparation helps the skin heal faster after a laser peel. Sun screen and sun protection before and after the peel is also very helpful to encourage a good result.

What do I look like while my skin is healing?

During the recovery period following a laser peel, there will be some oozing and swelling of the skin for a few days. A dressing or ointments are usually applied to the skin to prevent crusting and scabbing. The skin will gradually heal within 14 days.

How should I care for my skin after the peel?

About 2 weeks after the laser peel, the skin will still be pink and smooth. Makeup may be used at this time. Strict sun avoidance is necessary until the pink discoloration disappears. There are creams that can be applied to help heal and protect the skin. Glycolic-acid products or Retin-A, can usually be restarted a few weeks after a laser peel has healed.