



ding beauty

BEAUTY SPRING 2007

The actress Paula Patton

How lasers work:

In dermatology-speak, the word "laser" is a catchall for devices that use intense beams of focused bright light, those that use intense pulsed light (producing short, quick flashes) and ones that employ radio frequency or electromagnetic energy. To diminish wrinkles, some types of lasers, like Titan and Thermage, send energy deep into the dermis (the lower layers of skin) without damaging the epidermis (the upper layer). That energy creates heat and a slight injury, which sends the body into repair mode, encouraging existing collagen (a building block of skin) to contract and become tighter, and stimulating new collagen and elastin (another building block) to be produced. The result? Smoother, plumper, more youthful-looking skin. Other lasers, like Lyra, Affirm and V-Beam, have specific wavelengths that are attracted only to certain pigments, such as red or brown, and destroy anything within that color range, so they work well on blood vessels, spider veins, sunspots and hair. **What a laser procedure is like:** Most involve an application of topical anesthesia or a cooling gel, followed by a few passes of the device over the area to be treated. Patients usually experience slight warmth or a mild burning sensation, which dissipates quickly. Aftereffects can be similar to a sunburn — including some redness, swelling or flaking for up to a few days. **How to find the right person to perform the procedure:** Since you do not need a license to operate a laser, it's best to look for a board-certified dermatologist (check the American Academy of Dermatology Web site at www.aad.org) who has lasers as a major part of his or her practice. Be sure to do your research: in the wrong hands, you could be burned or scarred. Adds Dennis Gross, M.D., a dermatologist and dermatological surgeon in New York (212-725-4555), "A word-of-mouth recommendation never hurts." **How to take care of post-laser skin:** Use gentle products, don't scrub and slather on a nonirritating sunscreen — like one with zinc oxide — on a daily basis. **Cost:** It depends on the doctor, the size of the area to be treated and the strength of the laser.

Forehead wrinkles

WHAT'S NEW Afraid of injections? Thermage, which operates on radio frequency, passes electricity between electrodes placed on the skin. The area in between the electrodes heats up and causes a micro-injury. New, smaller Thermage tips allow doctors to use lower energy levels, going over the skin several times in one appointment without discomfort, Dr. Battle says.

BETTER THAN BOTOX? It's both better and worse: according to Dr. Battle, the results are only half as effective but can last 9 to 16 months, instead of Botox's 3 to 4.

STATS About \$750 a session.

Other wrinkles

WHAT WORKS If, like Nora Ephron, you feel bad about your neck — or shallow wrinkles elsewhere — there are options like the Titan, an infrared light that also uses heat to boost collagen; because it doesn't affect the epidermis, it's a good choice for fragile areas, like the neck, which are prone to scarring and hyperpigmentation.

F.Y.I. The Titan produces immediate effects; it works on all skin pigments, and it's an alternative to fillers and, in some cases, face-lifts (and you won't end up with that wind-tunnel look).

STATS \$750 a treatment; 3 to 5 treatments are usually needed. To maintain results, you'll probably need to return to your dermatologist once a year.

ANOTHER OPTION Unlike older resurfacing procedures, which completely ablated the top layer of skin and left a red, oozing mess, fractional lasers, like Fraxel, use infrared light to create microscopic columns of damage. Healthy, unaffected cells help the healing process, without leaving a wound, says Roy Geronemus, M.D., a dermatologist and laser specialist and the director of the Laser and Skin Surgery Center of New York (212-686-7308).

BONUS Smokers, who tend not to heal as well as nonsmokers, may substitute lasers for surgery, since there is minimal healing time.

STATS \$400 to \$1,500 a session for Fraxel treatment; 3 to 4 are usually needed, with maintenance sessions once a year.

Improving skin color and texture

WHAT WORKS Fractional lasers like Fraxel and Affirm make skin look smoother and more even by lightening excess pigmentation and causing collagen production that helps plump up skin. (They even work on melasma, brownish spots that can be triggered by pregnancy, birth control and hormone replacement therapy.) They also help reduce pore size and smooth out rough patches and scars by getting rid of surface debris like dead skin cells.

BONUS Fractional lasers can sometimes also tighten the skin. One patient of Dr. Geronemus reported that she experienced diminished wrinkles and slight lightening along the jaw line, which she wasn't expecting.

STATS About \$500 to \$800 a session for Fraxel; slightly more for Affirm (even though a session of Affirm takes



about 20 minutes, compared with an hour for Fraxel). Since each treatment affects only about 20 percent of the skin surface, a series of 3 or 4 sessions is recommended (to make sure the entire face gets equal resurfacing time), with follow-ups once or twice a year.

Rosacea

WHAT WORKS Those who have rosacea, or extremely sensitive skin, can treat symptoms like ruddiness with Vbeam, which uses infrared light to target pigment and can also be used to treat acne.

BONUS There's no need for anesthetic, since Vbeam "sprays a cooling burst of air immediately before the laser hits to reduce heat and pain," Dr. Gross says. "Keeping the skin's temperature static in this way means there's no inflammation."

STATS \$300 and up a session, though it is often covered by insurance; 3 to 6 treatments are usually needed, and 1 or 2 maintenance sessions a year.

Scars

WHY THEY LOOK THE WAY THEY DO Scars that don't look that bad when you're in your teens can look deeper as the skin ages and loses volume.

WHAT WORKS Dr. Gross recommends a noninvasive light laser called Smoothbeam, which heats up the deeper layers of the dermis to stimulate collagen, plumping up the scars to make them less noticeable. Fraxel does the same thing and, since it ablates some of the surface skin, can get rid of excess pigment as well.

STATS About \$150 a session for Smoothbeam; 3 or more treatments are usually needed. Fraxel also requires 3 or more treatments at about \$300 or more each.

Acne

WHAT WORKS If having pimples at 45 is even worse than having them at 15, try L.E.D. (or light-emitting diode, a low-energy laser light) combined with Levulan Kerastick, a topical drug, says Dr. Bruce Katz, the medical director of the Juva Skin and Laser Center in New York (212-688-6882). The Levulan is absorbed by bacteria and oil glands. "Then when the skin is exposed to L.E.D., it releases energy that damages oil glands and kills bacteria," he says.

THE GOOD NEWS Besides a marked improvement in their acne, patients may see an improvement in texture and tone, and the combination can combat precancerous spots.

STATS \$500 to \$800 a session; about 4 to 6 sessions are usually needed to eradicate acne, with follow-ups every 2 to 4 weeks.

Sun damage

THE GOOD NEWS Lasers can do more than get rid of the dark spots, wrinkles and other, unsightly effects of sun damage; they can help get rid of precancerous spots.

WHAT WORKS Arielle Kauvar, M.D., the director of New York Laser and Skin Care (212-249-9440), pairs L.E.D. and Levulan; she says that when Levulan is absorbed into rapidly dividing cells, like those that can become cancer, and activated by light, the result is an acute burst of free radical damage that kills those cells. "The spots turn into

rough areas that peel away in days, with no scarring, and will also help prevent new precancerous cells," she says. Since an entire patch of skin is treated, it will pick up spots not visible to the naked eye.

STATS About \$200 to \$900 a session; most people have 1 or 2 treatments; those with severe sun damage may want periodic follow-ups.

Puffy, saggy eyes

WHAT WORKS If you're against surgery but pro youth, treatment with a new handpiece to the Fraxel laser could be the answer.

WHOM IT'S FOR Someone with minimal sagging, not extreme droopiness, says Dr. Wendy W. Lee, an assistant professor at Bascom Palmer Eye Institute at the University of Miami School of Medicine (305-326-8434). Benefits include a decrease in the amount of excess skin on the upper and lower eyelids and improvement in dark circles and crepe-textured skin under the eyes — but Fraxel will not flatten under-eye fat pads.

NOT AN EYELIFT "This has been a promising alternative to a surgical blepharoplasty," Dr. Lee says. "The results may not be as dramatic as what surgery can provide, but it's much less invasive."

HOW IT WORKS The treatment involves applying numbing drops, followed by metal shields placed underneath the eyelids for protection before the laser is applied.

STATS About \$200 a lid; a series is recommended.

F.Y.I. One of Dr. Lee's patients reported some additional tightening of her eyelids.

ANOTHER OPTION If you have wrinkles, crow's-feet or dark circles, Dr. Battle recommends the Aluma, a radio frequency laser that shoots energy across — not into — the skin, so there's no penetration and harm to the eyeball. The heat-induced collagen stimulation plumps up wrinkles and crow's-feet, and because the heat constricts blood vessels, it helps reduce dark circles.

STATS About \$250 to \$350 a session; most people have 3 to 6 treatments.

Tighten sagging skin

WHAT CAN BE DONE All of those yummy mummies sporting perfectly taut abdomens mere months after giving birth? It might not be perfect genes or a rigorous Pilates regimen. "Titan works well for tightening the abdomen, especially after childbirth," says Leslie Baumann, M.D., a dermatology professor and the chief of the Division of Cosmetic Dermatology at the University of Miami School of Medicine (305-532-5552). "We're using it on knees, stomachs, necks and arms — anything that sags."

HOW IT WORKS The Titan works the same way on sagging skin as on wrinkles: existing collagen becomes contracted and denser, while new collagen is stimulated for an overall tighter appearance.

NO INCRIMINATING EVIDENCE "Tummy tucks are still the most effective way to decrease skin sagging, but they result in a huge scar that goes from one pelvic bone to another," says Dr. Baumann, noting that the scar is much bigger than a C-section scar. (So don't believe the scarless plastic surgery that you see on the show "Nip/Tuck.")

STATS About \$600 a session; there are immediate results after 1 treatment, though some people may need up to 5 sessions.

Stretch marks

WHAT'S NEW If your yo-yo-dieting friends show no evidence of their weight losses and gains — i.e., stretch marks — Fraxel may be their secret. While existing treatments have been successful in targeting new, reddish marks, nothing has proven effective on older, white-ish ones until now.

HOW IT WORKS Joely Kaufman, M.D., an assistant professor of dermatology at the University of Miami School of Medicine (305-532-5552), says that Fraxel stimulates collagen, making the skin surface look less bumpy, and addresses pigmentary issues to lessen the look and texture of stretch marks across the hips, breasts and abdomen, and it's safe for those who plan to breast-feed.

STATS About \$600 to \$1,200 a session; 3 to 5 usually needed.

Cellulite

WHAT WORKS If you have dimples in places other than your cheeks, there are two new lasers that might help: the VelaSmooth and TriActive break up fatty deposits and smooth out bumps, with about 30 to 50 percent improvement.

HOW THEY WORK TriActive stimulates microcirculation to help remove fluid from fat cells, shrinking them so they won't bulge. It also includes a cooling device thought to reduce fluid retention and suction to break the fibrous connective tissues that trap fat cells and cause bulging. VelaSmooth uses infrared light, mechanical rollers and vacuum suction to soften the bands that cause dimpling.

INSIDER TIP Don't be fooled by the company's patient testimonials that VelaSmooth feels like a massage; even doctors admit it hurts.

STATS About \$1,200 to \$1,800 for 16 sessions; 30-minute sessions twice a week are suggested. These treatments won't get rid of cellulite permanently, and they don't prevent new cellulite, so you'll need to go in regularly for maintenance, while continuing to diet and exercise.

Body sculpture

WHAT WORKS "No matter how many squats and lunges I did, there was no change in my

hips and saddlebags, so I wanted to get them taken care of," says the 37-year-old Colleen Donovan, an aesthetician and laser technician in Long Beach, N.Y. So she turned to SmartLipo, which Dr. Katz says he uses in his practice to sculpt the face, arms, abdomen and knees.

HOW IT WORKS SmartLipo's infrared light evenly liquefies cellulite and fatty deposits, so it can help reduce the appearance of cellulite and remove fat. A thin cannula, with a red light shines through the skin, making it easier to target fat with precision.

STATS About \$3,000 to \$7,000, depending on the number of areas treated.

INSIDER INFO SmartLipo is reportedly less painful than traditional liposuction, but it isn't painless; "I felt nothing during the procedure, but was sore for about three days, much worse than after an intense workout," Donovan says. "I wore a compression girdle for two weeks and was comfortably back to my normal activity after two weeks, although I waited a month to go back to the gym."

Hair removal

WHAT'S NEW Though women with light hair still aren't candidates for laser hair removal — they'll have to be smug in the knowledge that no one can see their hair anyway

— now at least dark-skinned women can undergo the procedure, provided they also have darker hair. Thanks to new lasers like CoolGlide, which employ longer wavelengths that aren't absorbed well by melanin, there's minimal risk of blistering and hyper- or hypo-pigmentation.

A FEW CAVEATS Laser hair removal is never completely effective, and despite any good news you may have heard about new at-home removal devices, the Food and Drug Administration has issued warnings about them.

STATS About \$200 to \$800 a session, with each one bringing about 20 to 40 percent hair loss, depending on hair color; 4 to 8 sessions are usually needed.

Spider veins

WHAT'S NEW For evenly colored, Barbie-like legs (in tone, if not in shape), consider Lyla. It has a wavelength absorbed only by red and purple pigment; perfect to remove spider veins and blood vessels.

HOW IT WORKS The laser heats up the blood vessels and spider veins, so they collapse or dissolve and are then excreted by the immune system. The Lyla's cooling tip reduces the chance of redness, pain and swelling.

STATS About \$200 a session; several usually needed. ■

