



the . magic of light

3 POPULAR LASER TREATMENTS PROMISE TO USE “LIGHT THERAPY” TO REJUVENATE SKIN. HERE’S A DERMATOLOGIST’S LOWDOWN ON EACH.
By Meredith Tamirian

A current TV commercial makes a mock-serious pitch to “people with skin.” It’s not clear whom that group omits, but it surely includes some who’ll wish to consider laser “light therapy” skin treatments. They’re for people who have skin and want it to look its best.

Any treatment is a trade-off of risks and benefits, but the three described below are relatively noninvasive ones that have become popular. Shilpi Khetarpal, M.D., a board-certified dermatologist at the Cleveland Clinic, describes each. (Be sure to seek the advice of a trained medical professional who has examined your skin before you undertake one of these, or any, skin procedures.) So read on, not just for enlightenment but because—well, you’ve got skin in the game.

Fractional laser resurfacing. Dr. Khetarpal calls this treatment “the gold standard for rejuvenating skin and treating acne scars.” Don’t confuse it with regular laser resurfacing. The key word here is “fractional” because, unlike typical laser resurfacing that removes the entire surface of the skin, fractional laser resurfacing treats less of the skin at a given time. With this treatment, there is less chance of negative side effects as well as less required downtime—though the procedure does result in visible marks and swelling as skin heals. While healing is often a hassle, many people view the process as worthwhile because of the amazing cosmetic results once the skin heals. Another caveat

to this treatment is that because only a portion of the skin is treated at a time, two sessions are usually required, the second being scheduled three to four months after the first. There are many different types of fractional lasers being used in offices around the country, so talk to a doctor to find out what type of treatment would be best for you.

The cost factor: Most insurance companies do not cover laser skin resurfacing because it is considered a cosmetic procedure. A session can cost from \$300 upwards depending on the type of laser used and the area being treated.

Laser hair removal. This is probably the laser treatment you’ve heard the most about. In the past few years, it’s been the go-to for those looking to take steps out of their beauty routine while still maintaining the look and feel of a fresh wax or shave. In this procedure, light converts to heat, damaging hair follicles to help prevent regrowth. For best results, multiple sessions are required. The sensation of the procedure is commonly described as a rubber band snapped on the skin, but that may be a small price to pay if you no longer accidentally nick yourself in the shower. The American Academy of Dermatology considers laser hair removal safe and effective when in experienced hands. Dr. Khetarpal echoes this, calling it “safe and effective for all skin colors and ethnic backgrounds” and adding that “with a series of treatments you’re able to permanently reduce over 90 percent of the hairs in the area that

is treated.” One drawback, the doctor notes, is that the treatment only works on dark hairs.

The cost factor: This treatment is usually done in a dermatologist’s office or a reputable med spa, typically for \$200 to \$400 per session. There are also commercial lasers available for people to purchase and use in the comfort of their own homes.

Photodynamic therapy (PDT). If you’re going to be blue, let’s hope it’s only because you’re under blue lights, which are often used in PDT. In combination with photosensitizing agents, lights of various wavelengths (dependent on the specifics of the patient’s treatment) are used to activate a photochemical reaction that targets unwanted tissues such as acne as well as several kinds of growths, both malignant and benign. Besides treating cancers, PDT can treat bacterial, fungal and viral infections. It’s widely performed throughout dermatology, and a peer-reviewed article published in *Clinical, Cosmetic and Investigational Dermatology* insists that the procedure is safe and effective and leaves patients with great results and few to no negative side effects. One thing to keep in mind, Dr. Khetarpal tells us, is that while PDT can work wonders as a medical treatment for precancerous growths, “it does not have much of an aesthetic benefit.”

The cost factor: Because of PDT’s ability to treat serious medical conditions, the treatment is covered by most insurance companies.