

# BEAUTY & HEALTH

Skin  
report

LIGHTENING UP  
HAPPINESS IS KNOWING  
YOUR SKIN LOOKS  
GREAT. PHOTOGRAPHED  
BY CHRIS STURMAN.

## glow on

An amazingly effective new light-based acne treatment is quick, painless, and free of side effects. Patients are beaming, reports Kara Jesella.

In the war against imperfect skin, dermatologists have finally seen the light. The ClearLight, that is. ClearLight is the first FDA-approved light-based therapy for inflammatory acne (the kind that looks like angry red bumps), and it's causing a commotion in doctors' offices around the country. "It's a fantastic alternative to topicals and antibiotics," says Macrene Alexiades-Armenakas, M.D., a Manhattan dermatologist who offers the brand new treatment. During each session, the patient ►

# BEAUTY & HEALTH

Skin  
report

table with goggles over her eyes and the high-intensity lamp directed at her face (or wherever acne is present on the body) for fifteen minutes. Though the light has no effect on regular skin, it causes the bacteria in acne to self-destruct. The treatment is painless and requires no downtime, so you can go out immediately afterward, looking just like you did before—or even better, since many patients have reported significant improvement after just one or two sessions. Patients receive eight treatments over a span of four weeks. Results usually last four to eight months; after that, occasional touch-ups are necessary.

So who makes a good candidate? "It's for people who want the fastest results they can get," says Laurie Polis, M.D., head of SoHo Skin & Laser Dermatology in New York City. "Statistics show 70 to 80 percent of ClearLight patients clear up in less than a month! There is no other treatment available on the market today with results that fast." It's great if you often forget to take your acne medication. "All you have to remember is your doctor's appointment," says Manhattan-based dermatologist Paul Jarrod Frank, M.D. ClearLight is also an option for those who find that lotions, potions, and pills haven't worked, or that their current medication gives them dry skin, stomachaches, or other unwanted side effects. Alexiades-Armenakas plans to recommend it to teens who are going away to boarding school or college. "I try to stay on top of my acne patients' needs, and that requires their coming in regularly which isn't always realistic," she says. "I need to have something that will put them in remission. If you do ClearLight in August and go away in September, you can be free of acne until Christmas." And the treatment may have added benefits as well. "A lot of patients are describing skin texture improvement," says Vic Narurkar, M.D., a dermatologic laser specialist in San Francisco. "It may even improve the scarring and discoloration from acne."

But if it doesn't, there's another light-based treatment that will. Robert Guida, M.D., a Manhattan-based plastic surgeon ([www.DrGuida.com](http://www.DrGuida.com)) is using a new combination therapy to get rid of pitted acne scars. First, he uses microdermabrasion, a treatment in which tiny crystals sand the top layer of skin to reveal a brighter complexion.

underneath. Next, he uses the Cool Touch II laser, which tightens collagen fibers, smoothing out the pits. Guida suggests this treatment for older teens who no longer have active pimples. "If you have rip-roaring acne, you need to wait until it's cleared," he says.

"Otherwise, what's the benefit?" The treatment needs to be repeated four to five times, with a four to six week interval between sessions. Patients will see up to 75 percent improvement in their scars—an amazing statistic.

The biggest downside? The cost, which is usually \$1,200 a session. ClearLight is also pricey, at \$75 to \$200 a treat-

ment. And neither is covered by Mom and Dad's insurance. But since ClearLight debuted, companies have been scrambling to offer other light-based technologies to combat acne and acne scars, which means there could be a deluge of less expensive options in the future. To find ClearLight in your area, go to [www.skinandhealth.com](http://www.skinandhealth.com).

## what's up, doc?

Breaking free of breakouts can seem impossible, but Sarah Boyd discovers perfect skin may be only a prescription away.

If a less-than-clear complexion is causing you to hide in your room instead of hitting the party circuit, listen up. It's not you that's the problem—it's your acne treatment. Acne meds are like everything else in life: There isn't one sure fix for everyone. And with so many different products available, there's no reason to suffer. "When you've been using the product as directed for at least six to eight weeks and

your acne is not improving, it's time to switch from over-the-counter medications," says Lisa Airan, M.D., a New York City dermatologist.

So if you've tried every lotion and potion on the drugstore shelf and still have unwanted bumps, tell your parents you'd like to visit the dermatologist to find out which prescription products may work for you. Most of the time, parents will be understanding; acne is often genetic, so there's a good chance Mom and Dad have suffered from spots, too. Though doctor visits and prescription zit-zappers tend to be more expensive than their over-the-counter alternatives, your parents' insurance will often cover a large portion of the cost.

**S**o let's start from the beginning: Why do you get blemishes in the first place?

"Acne develops in the glands," says Audrey Kunin, M.D., a Kansas City, Missouri, dermatologist and founder of Dermadoctor.com. "People who are acne prone have cells that don't shed as they should and become stuck together, forming a plug." Oils build up and bacteria increase in numbers, resulting in acne. Here's a breakdown of the best doctor-recommended remedies.

### Topical Vitamin A Derivatives

These are perfect for lower grades of acne, such as blackheads, whiteheads, small red bumps, and occasional flare-ups of inflammatory acne (larger pimples that are sometimes filled with pus). "They help to improve the turnover of the skin by preventing cells from clumping together," says Airan. "This helps normalize the skin." Most vitamin A derivatives are prescribed in a gel or cream formula—depending on your skin type—and are applied once a day, usually at night. Because of the increased skin-cell turnover, your face may become

more sensitive to sunlight, so you'll need to wear sunscreen every day (something you should be doing anyway). Other side effects can include irritation, redness, and dryness. Commonly prescribed topical vitamin A derivatives are Differin, Retin-A Micro, and Tazorac.



### Topical Antibiotics

Topical antibiotics have some similarities to topical vitamin A derivatives: They work well on lower grades of acne, come in gel, cream, or lotion form, and are used once or twice a day.

However, instead of causing the skin to shed cells to prevent pore plugging, these products actually kill the bacteria that cause acne. In addition to experiencing possible sun sensitivity and dry, red skin, some patients may be resistant to the antibiotics, which means they simply won't work. Topical antibiotics include Cleocin T and Azalex.

### Oral Antibiotics

"Oral antibiotics are used to treat moderate to severe inflammatory acne," says Karyn Grossman, M.D., a Los Angeles-based dermatologist. Patients take a daily pill, which internally kills the bacteria that create acne. Oral antibiotics have more side effects than topical medications—tetracycline, for example, must be taken on an empty stomach and may cause nausea and dizziness—and so are usually used in more severe cases. Members of the tetracycline family include minocycline and doxycycline.

### Birth Control Pills

If breakouts occur monthly at the same time in your menstrual cycle, they may be caused by fluctuating hormones. Going on a pill like Ortho Tri-Cyclen or Estrostep will help suppress the hormones that overproduce oil in the skin. "But it is not a magic bullet," warns Grossman. "Even on the Pill, you can experience flare-ups." If so, you can also use over-the-counter products or other prescriptions. ►

# BEAUTY & HEALTH

**Skin  
report**

## Accutane

"Most acne prescriptions are stronger versions of products sold over the counter. Accutane is the only real miracle cure for acne," says Paul Jarrod Frank, M.D., a New York City dermatologist. "It's great when given and taken responsibly." That said, Accutane is a serious medication only prescribed for severe cases. It is taken orally for 20 weeks and usually results in complete clearing and long-term remission. Potential side effects include extremely dry skin, dry nose and mouth, high sun sensitivity, and birth defects in pregnant women. Ask your doctor about these and other possible side effects, like depression.

Getting a prescription is the first step, but it's also important to

follow instructions very closely. Use topical medications sparingly: Layering them on like a mask won't make your acne disappear more quickly, and over applying products is the most common cause of excessive burning, drying, and irritation. Under use will yield partial, if any, results. Remember, several weeks may pass before you start to see a difference. Except for Accutane, these prescription products don't promise a long-term acne-free appearance, so you need to keep using them, even after your skin has improved. You'll also need to make regular trips to the doctor, who can monitor your progress and assess any problems. But rest assured, with a dermatologist's help and continued use of the right products, you're on your way to smoother, clearer skin.



**BIORÉ DOUBLE AGENT**  
ACNE TREATMENT, \$7.



**NEUTROGENA CLEAR**  
PORE CLEANSER/MASK, \$7.



**L'OREAL PURE ZONE**  
SKIN RELIEF OIL-FREE  
MOISTURIZER, \$8.

**FIRST DEFENSE**  
BEFORE CALLING  
THE DOCTOR, GIVE  
DRUGSTORE  
PRODUCTS A TRY!



**NOXZEMA TRIPLE**  
CLEAN ANTIBACTERIAL  
CLEANSER, \$4.



**CLEAN & CLEAR**  
BLACKHEAD CLEARING  
ASTRINGENT, \$5.



**CLEARASIL DAILY FACE**  
WASH FOR SENSITIVE  
SKIN, \$4.