

Lasers:

The new, no-surgery solution

Can your dermatologist's secret weapon work for you? Photographed by Andrew Bettles

Zap! Your troubles are gone. Sound impossible? These quick, intense, relatively pain-free beams of light have revolutionized cosmetic dermatology. But in the wrong hands, lasers can burn and scar patients, so it's important to get a referral from someone who has had good results. "Lasers are technique sensitive," warns Harold Lancer, M.D., a cosmetic dermatologist in Beverly Hills.

"Caution and experience are worthwhile." The success of a treatment often depends on the patient's age, ethnicity and skin type, so consult your doctor and adjust your expectations accordingly. Also, lasers can trigger cold sores, so remember to take antiviral medication before any procedure if you are susceptible.
Alev Aktar

Skin resurfacing

Fine Lines

Brown Spots

Blood vessels

Acne

Laser Names	UltraPulse Encore, CB Erbium/2.94, Profile	CoolTouch II, NLite, Smoothbeam, Lyra-i, IPL Quantum SR	Medlite, IPL Quantum SR	DioLite, Vbeam, Aura-I	Smoothbeam, ClearLight, Vbeam
What they do	Erase deep wrinkles, scars and sun damage and help tighten skin.	Smooth fine lines around mouth, eyes, cheeks and forehead. Tighten pores. Reduce certain scars	Remove pigmentation on the face, chest or hands. For best results, do not use on tanned or self-tanned skin.	Eliminate broken blood vessels or capillaries on the face	Smoothbeam and Vbeam help mild to moderate acne. ClearLight works on inflammatory acne.
How they work	The skin is vaporized as far down as the lower dermis. UltraPulse requires local or general anesthesia; CB Erbium/2.94 and Profile: usually a topical anesthetic and sedation.	They stimulate collagen production. IPL Quantum SR is not technically a laser, as it uses intense pulsed light instead of a single beam at one wavelength, but its results are similar to a laser's.	They target and vaporize dark pigment. Though IPL Quantum SR is not a laser (it uses intense pulsed light instead of a single beam at one wavelength), its effects are comparable.	They target the color red, heating up blood vessels until they disintegrate, thus neutralizing redness.	For temporary acne control (four to six months). Smoothbeam reduces the number of lesions. ClearLight attacks bacteria in the skin. Vbeam shrinks oil glands.
Side effects	A week or more to heal. Skin may remain pink up to six months. Loss of pigment, infection, hyperpigmentation and scarring possible.	Redness and swelling may occur for several hours afterward. If misused, blistering, bruising and scarring can occur.	As the skin heals, it will develop a crust that lasts from several days to a week. It may remain pink for up to a week or may lighten.	May cause redness, swelling and bruising for up to 48 hours.	This treatment may cause slight redness.
Cost	From \$1000 to \$7000. Typically only one visit to the dermatologist is needed.	From \$200 to \$600 per treatment. A minimum of three treatments is usually recommended.	\$75 or more per treatment, depending on areas addressed. For IPL Quantum SR, several visits are advised.	\$200 or more per treatment. As many as three applications may be required.	From \$75 to \$600 per treatment; two to eight are necessary, depending on the laser used.
Comments	"The best-case scenario is that you look like you've had a facelift. The worst case is scarring and irregular pigmentation," states Pat Wexler, M.D., cosmetic dermatologist (New York City, 212684-2626).	If utilized properly, "nonablative lasers don't break the skin and don't have recovery time. There aren't any downsides," says Dennis F Gross, M.D., dermatologist (NYC, 212-725-4555).	"Superficial brown spots respond extremely well to lasers; deeper lesions might need to be surgically excised," says Robert A. Guida, M.D., facial plastic surgeon (NYC, 212871-0900). www.drguida.com	"The success of the treatment will vary depending on gender, age and ethnicity. In general, these lasers are exceedingly successful," says Lancer (Beverly Hills, 310-278-8444).	"Lasers clear up the skin by 50 to 70 percent, but results aren't permanent," reports Paul Jarrod Frank, M.D., cosmetic dermatologist (NYC, 212-3272919). ■