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FEBRUARY 2012

Should You Zap Your Way to Perfect Skin?

Celebs aren't magically immune to dark spots, acne scars and fine lines—many just use lasers to get rid of them. Now that the practice has spread beyond Hollywood, you need this pros-and-cons guide too! BY JESSICA BAUMGARDNER



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IME FOR A QUICK GAME of Would You Rather: Onetime plane ticket to Paris, or no more zits for a year? A new computer you'll replace in two years, or permanent removal of the tattoo you now regret? If you voted for getting rid of those zits or that tramp stamp, then you'll want to hear about laser treatments—once extreme (and sometimes dodgy) beauty procedures that, while still expensive, are now within save-up-able reach. "Lasers have become more sophisticated, innovative and available, and can treat skin concerns with a more targeted approach," says New York City dermatologist Fredric Brandt, M.D. That means better results in fewer sessions. Got a little something in mind? Here's the deal.

To Zap Redness

How lasers do it: Red scars, rosacea, spider veins and broken capillaries can all be treated by a laser that cooks your blood vessels' red cells, causing the vessels to seal and die. Pulsed-dye or KTP lasers are good for obvious spots, like port-wine stains. If the redness is more diffuse, as rosacea often is, IPL (intense pulsed light—not technically a laser) can also be helpful.

Price: \$400 to \$800 per laser treatment, or \$200 to \$700 for IPL; you'll need three to six sessions. *Continued on next page* ➔

What it feels like: "It pinched, like a rubber band snap; my tolerance rose as sessions went on," says Theresa, 30, who tried IPL. **The downside:** "Rosacea flare-ups are triggered by lifestyle," says New York City dermatologist Patricia Wexler, M.D. "You can get rid of dilated blood vessels, but new ones will appear if you drink, smoke or tan." **Expert tip:** "Dark skin is tricky to treat. See someone experienced," says Washington, D.C., dermatologist Elizabeth Tanzi, M.D.

To Zap Zits

How lasers do it: Actually, the best treatments for acne are light treatments, not lasers. Dr. Wexler recommends Isolaz, which combines pore suction and IPL, to kill bacteria and stop inflammation. A second round (in the same session) delivers salicylic acid, drying and tightening the pores and preventing new breakouts. **Price:** About \$350 to \$500 per Isolaz treatment; you'll need between three and eight. **What it feels like:** A *Glamour* editor tried Isolaz and found it relaxing. **The downside:** The price! And there's no zit-free guarantee. Dr. Wexler says there's a 75 percent chance of clear skin for up to a year after eight consecutive treatments. **Expert tip:** IPL is off-limits if you're pregnant or have herpes (the heat can cause a cold sore flare-up).

Want more advice? Head to glamour.com/about/skin-care.

To Zap Fine Lines

How lasers do it: Fractional nonablative lasers (a.k.a. Fraxel) heat columns of tissue and create microscopic wounds under skin's surface. During healing, collagen rebuilds and tightens lines—pretty darn effectively, say the women we talked to. **Price:** \$700 to several thousand dollars for each of up to six treatments. **What it feels like:** "Slightly hot," says Stephanie, 29, who had Fraxel Restore on her face, neck and chest to correct sun damage. **The downside:** Redness and peeling, depending on type of laser. And, of course, the cost. **Expert tip:** "Wear sunscreen—or you'll be back in my office," says Eric Bernstein, M.D., a Pennsylvania dermatologic laser surgeon.

To Zap Tattoos

How lasers do it: Their heat breaks ink into tiny particles that your body safely absorbs. **Price:** Anywhere from \$50 and up per session, depending on how drunk you were when you got the tattoo (i.e., how big it is).

And because different ink colors respond to different lasers, "a multicolor tattoo can take 10 to 20 sessions," says Dr. Tanzi. **What it feels like:** "For a few days, it felt like a bruised muscle," says Rebecca, 31, who's having a butterfly removed from her lower abdomen. "The annoying part is that you don't see immediate results." **The downside:** Even after many sessions, "you can have a little ink left deep in the skin," says Dr. Tanzi. (Still, no one will be able to make out your ex's name anymore.) **Expert tip:** Don't try to remove a tattoo that's less than a year old, says Arielle Kauvar, M.D., a dermatologist in New York City.

To Zap Body Hair

How lasers do it: A pulse of light heats the hair follicle, triggering an inflammatory response that interrupts growth almost permanently. Traditional lasers work best on dark hair and light skin, but new ones can treat other combos. **Price:** From \$75 per session for the chin to up to \$1,200 per session for full legs. Experts recommend six sessions, a month or two apart. **What it feels like:** "Pulsing pinpricks," says Nicole, 37, who had it on her underarms. **The downside:** It's practically forever—are you sure you want to be 80 years old with a Brazilian? **Expert tip:** Go when you're not tan. And shave—don't pluck or wax—before, advises Dr. Tanzi. You want the root intact but no stubble that could catch on fire (yowch!).

To Zap Fat

How lasers do it: Fat pockets (hi, bra-strap pooches) can be frozen with laser-like cooling treatments; the fat breaks down and is digested by your body. CoolSculpting is the method of choice for derms. "People lose approximately 20 to 25 percent of extra fat in the spot targeted within three months," claims Dr. Tanzi. Fat cells actually die, so the results are permanent, or at least until you gain weight. **Price:** \$600 to \$1,500 or more per area; only one visit usually required. **What it feels like:** "Unusual, with tingling and a cool sensation," says Joey, 28, who tried CoolSculpting on her stomach. **The downside:** You might get better results from a personal trainer. **Expert tip:** Schedule a consultation before you get too excited—this type of procedure works only on fat, not loose skin. ■

Is At-Home Stuff Just as Good?

A new crop of lotions, serums and heat-emitting devices claim laserlike results. Bottom line: They're not laser perfect, but they're the next best thing if you want to...

BLAST A ZIT
Zeno Hot Spot (\$40, my.zeno.com)

SHRINK YOUR PORES
Lancôme Visionnaire [LR 2412 4%] Advanced Skin Corrector (\$84, lancome.com)

HIDE LITTLE LINES
Neutrogena Rapid Wrinkle Repair Eye Cream (\$21, neutrogena.com)

ADD SOME GLOW
Dr. Andrew Weil for Origins Mega-Bright Skin tone correcting serum (\$55, origins.com in March)

PLUMP UP SKIN
Garnier Ultra-Lift 2-in-1 Wrinkle Reducer Serum + Moisturizer (\$17, at drugstores)

DEFUZZ LEGS
Nolmol Hair in Pink (\$270, trynono.com)

STILLS: CATHY CRAWFORD