SKIN ▪ SKIN CONCERNS ▪ SKIN TREATMENTS

Considering Skin Laser Treatments? Derms Share Everything You Need to Know

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In recent years, skin laser treatments have surged in popularity. They have become noted as an effective solution for skin concerns like wrinkles, scarring, pigmentation issues, and unwanted hair. However, with so many different types and options available, figuring out which skin lasers are best can be overwhelming.

Looking to learn more? Ahead, we explore skin laser treatments in detail, seeking insights from a board-certified plastic surgeon to understand what to expect, benefits, costs, and more.

MEET THE EXPERT

- Adam Kolker, MD, is a board-certified plastic surgeon working out of NYC as well as an Associate Clinical Professor of Surgery at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai.
- Cosmetic dermatologist Paul Jarrod Frank, MD, is the chief medical officer and founder of PFRANKMD and the author of *The Pro-Aging Playbook*.

What Are Laser Treatments?

Laser treatments direct short, concentrated, pulsating light beams at skin irregularities to promote collagen growth and remove skin layers. They're used on everything from acne scars and tattoos, to hyperpigmentation, fine lines, and wrinkles. But not all lasers are created equal, and you'll want to make sure you find the right treatment for your skin before going under the light.

1. Ablative Laser Treatments

What It Targets: Improves "skin tone and texture as well as a reduction of fine lines and wrinkles," says Kolker. These are also often used to treat warts, scars, and other stubborn issues.

What to Expect: "Expect downtime of approximately seven days, with redness that may persist up to two weeks. These treatments are by far the most effective at reducing fine lines and wrinkles and balancing or removing skin discoloration," says Kolker. "These are also associated with the longest downtime and recovery periods. With the advent of 'fractional' technology, fractional CO2 treatments (Active FX, Deep FX, Total FX) are associated with slightly shorter recovery. By fractionating the laser treatment, it effectively delivers energy to the skin while leaving small areas unexposed to the thermal effect from which more rapid healing is initiated," he explains.

Effectiveness: "The most effective of all lasers remain the ablative group. Carbon Dioxide (CO2) lasers generally require the fewest number of treatments to achieve significant improvements," says Kolker.

2. Non-Ablative Laser Treatments

What It Targets: It treats things like "discoloration of the skin including melasma, dark spots, freckles," and other forms of "hyperpigmentation," says Kolker.

What to Expect: "These lasers penetrate the epidermis in a fractionated pattern, which is associated with considerably shorter downtime. Downtime after fractional laser, such as Fraxel, is considerably shorter and much milder than ablative laser treatment. Patients can expect to appear as if they have a sunburn, to have mild discoloration, or to be mildly swollen for three to five days," Kolker explains.

Effectiveness: Kokler tells us that "non-ablative lasers are also extremely effective at restoring youth and beauty to the skin." That being said, he also explains that "non-ablative fractional laser often require several treatments for the most effective results. There are two laser wavelengths: The 1550nm fractional laser is effective in treating very fine lines of the face, neck, hands, and decolletage, and improving general skin health. The 1927 wavelength laser is highly effective at treating discoloration of the skin."

3. Broad-Band Light or Intense Pulsed Light

What It Targets: Kolker tells us "they are very good for improving color balance within the skin by reducing areas of redness or hyperpigmentation." These treatments are meant to restore a youthful, glowing complexion.

What to Expect: These types of laser treatments "are associated with minimal downtime." It's basically just a round of short blasts of light.

Effectiveness: Though "minimal downtime is associated with this treatment, several treatments are often required," Kolker explains.

4. Other Energy Modalities (Radio Frequency, Ultrasound, and Thermal Energy Treatments)

What They Target: Firmness, elasticity, and plumpness.

What to Expect: This is "another spectrum of energy treatment modalities that are not laser light based that are also effective in rejuvenating skin, including radio frequency micro-needling, ultrasound, and thermal based technologies," explains Kolker.

Effectiveness: "While these have some temporary or long-term effect on skin tightness, they have little effect on color," Kolker clarifies. So if you are looking to treat issues like hyperpigmentation, one of the other treatments will be better suited to you.

What Types of Skin Concerns Can Laser Treatments Address?

Laser treatments can address a variety of skin concerns, including:

- Fine lines and wrinkles

- Uneven skin tone and texture
- Sun damage and age spots
- Acne scars
- Hyperpigmentation
- Rosacea
- Vascular lesions such as broken capillaries
- Tattoo removal
- Hair removal

How Much Do Laser Treatments Cost?

According to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, the average cost is $2,509 for ablative and $1,445 for non-ablative. The cost will very on the exact treatment you choose, as well as your geographical location. You'll want to consult with your doctor beforehand to get a more thorough breakdown of the cost.

What Are the Side Effects of Laser Treatments?

The side effects of laser treatments include redness, swelling, itching, acne, infection, and occasionally scarring, according to the Mayo Clinic. You'll want to be sure you're following your doctor's advice on aftercare and discuss your personal medical history to see if you're prone to any specific side effects.

Are Skin Laser Treatments Safe?

While skin laser treatments are generally safe when performed by a qualified practitioner, it's important to recognize that there are risks associated with these procedures. These may include potential side effects such as redness and swelling, as mentioned above.

Are Laser Treatments Painful?

The level of discomfort during skin laser treatments varies based on an individual's pain tolerance and the type of treatment. Most patients experience mild heat or discomfort, usually managed with topical anesthesia.

Ablative lasers may cause more pain and require longer treatment times compared to non-ablative lasers. Frank notes that topical anesthesia is usually sufficient for non-ablative lasers, while ablative lasers may require nerve blocks for pain management.

Is There Any Downtime or Recovery Period with Laser Treatments?

The recovery period following laser treatments varies depending on the procedure. With milder treatments, individuals may experience symptoms like redness, swelling, or mild discomfort, which usually subside within a few hours to days. However, more intensive treatments, such as ablative laser resurfacing, may require a longer recovery period, sometimes leaving skin red and swollen for several days to weeks.

How Long Do Results Last?

Results can last anywhere from three to 10 years, depending on what laser treatment you opt for. The longevity of your results will also depend on how many treatments you've completed (ablative lasers only require one, while non-ablative lasers can range from one to three), as well as how consistent you are with your own aftercare. After you've gone through you're treatment, you will be advised to stay out of the sun, stay hydrated, and use SPF to keep the skin healthy.

You can also talk to your doctor about if and when you'll want to do any follow-up treatments.