

Laser Resurfacing Postop Instructions

The Recovery Period

Laser resurfacing is essentially a precise, superficial burn of the skin. You should therefore expect the skin of your face to react appropriately. At the very least, expect to experience a mild **burning sensation** in your face, to undergo significant **swelling** in the treated areas (especially around the eyes) and to exude significant amounts of **clear straw-colored fluid** while the **reddened skin** attempts to **crust**.

This initial phase of healing is alarming to most patients. These reactions are normal, expected and last for **3 to 7 days**. You will be given a prescription for pain medication to help control any discomfort during this period. You may also use ice packs (packages of frozen peas work very well) on your face for additional soothing if you desire. You should sleep with your head elevated to help minimize swelling. You should obviously avoid strenuous activity and sweating during this phase as well.

New skin will resurface in anywhere from **7 to 10 days**, depending on the size of the area being resurfaced. Wound care, outlined below, should continue until this resurfacing is complete. For these reasons, most patients will stay at home for 7 to 10 days to recover.

During this later phase of healing, **itching** is a common complaint. Although diligent wound care will help minimize this symptom, you may take over-the-counter Benadryl (25 mg tablet every 6 hours) to help control this common symptom. Of course, you should avoid scratching or rubbing your face as it continues to heal.

The amount of **redness** that your face experiences is variable, depending on your skin type and numerous other factors. How long the redness persists is also variable. CO2 laser tends to impart redness that persists longer (1 to 3 months) than the Erbium YAG laser (2 to 4 weeks). Prolonged redness lasting up to 6 months is possible with any laser procedure, however. I will monitor this redness closely for you.

Wound Care

Skin treated by the laser resurfaces itself most smoothly in a **peaceful, moist** environment. **Crusting and scabbing** are to be **avoided** since these tend to cause irregularities in the healing. With these principles in mind, you should adhere to the following instructions to optimize the healing of your laser-resurfacing wound.

Wound Care (continued)

Keep the Vigilon or Second Skin dressing applied following surgery on your wound overnight. This gel dressing should then be changed one to two times a day, typically after you shower, for five days. Any areas of treated skin not covered by the gel dressing should be covered by a new layer of Vaseline each day. Although some of the gel dressing will stick to the treated skin unsupported, most of the dressing will require support in the form of elastic netting or bandages.

For the remainder of the 1 to 2 week resurfacing phase, you will simply cover the healing area with a thin layer of Vaseline 2 to 3 times a day. Again, this helps prevent scab or crust formation, which tends to make scars. The smoothest wound healing occurs beneath a cover of moist gel or ointment.

To change your gel dressing, use the following procedure:

Carefully remove the bandage or netting holding the gel dressing in place.

Gently peel away the gel layer coating the wound.

Shower your face, as described below.

Cut the new sections of gel dressing needed to cover the wound.

Using a pair of tweezers, remove the clear blue plastic from one side of the gel.

Apply the gel dressing, exposed side down, against the wound.

Leave the remaining layer of plain clear plastic on the outside surface of the gel.

Cover the gel dressing with elastic netting (or with gauze and tape) to keep the dressing in place.

If any scabs or crusts do form, do not pick or peel them off, as this also tends to make scars. Whatever crusts do not loosen by themselves with gentle cleaning below should be soaked off or left alone.

At least once a day, you should shower your face with clean water and mild soap in the shower. This will help loosen and remove crusting. However, try not to rub or scrub the wound in any way during the first 5 days as it tries to resurface itself with new cells. Simply "pat" on a lather of mild soap and shower it off. Replace the gel dressings after this cleaning.

After the first 5 days of healing, you may begin cleaning your wound *gently* with a light fingertip action using the running water. *Gentle* cleansing is the key. Be sure to promptly recover the wound with Vaseline after each cleaning.

Crusts that are resistant to shower cleaning can usually be "soaked" off using gauze pads or a clean washcloth soaked in ½ strength hydrogen peroxide or ½ strength vinegar. Apply the wet cloth or gauze to your face and allow it to soak the crust thoroughly. Then shower the face again. Do not use the soaking gauze or washcloth in a scrubbing manner. Simply soak with it.

Precautions

Don't apply makeup over the treated sites until after 10 days. A cover-up makeup to hide the initial color disparity with surrounding tissues is best and should contain a sunscreen to help protect the new tissues.

Don't apply any skin care products to your skin, such as glycolic acid, alpha hydroxy acid or skin bleaching creams until at least 2 to 3 weeks postoperatively (I will let you know when you may restart any of these products).

Freshly healed tissues are susceptible to sunlight or UV light exposure, which tends to turn new tissue red or pink. This redness may persist for months and can be noticeable. Therefore, protect your wound from sunlight and UV light as much as practical for at least 6 months. Since complete avoidance of these rays is not practical, coverage with clothing or hats is the next best option. At the very least, use sunscreens (or makeup with sunscreens) on the wound whenever outdoors.

Follow Up

I will typically see patients in follow up at 2 to 3 days after treatment and thereafter as necessary to ensure optimal healing and results (typically 1 week later and at 1, 3 and 6 months).

Side Effects and Possible Complications

Swelling can be dramatic and typically resolves within 3 to 5 days.

Redness is expected and typically resolves within 1 month for the CO2 laser and 2 weeks for the Erbium YAG laser. Prolonged redness lasting up to 6 months is possible, however. Cover-up makeup is the mainstay of treatment.

Itching is common during the second week of healing and usually responds to antihistamines, such as Benadryl.

Infection from bacteria is always possible but uncommon. We will attempt to prevent any bacterial infection with antibiotics during the resurfacing period. If, despite this preventive medication, your wound should become increasingly red, swollen and tender, please call my office immediately.

Viral breakout (herpes, cold sores, shingles) can occur following laser resurfacing even in people who were unaware they carry such viruses and have never had a breakout. In patients with a known history of such breakouts, we start preventive treatment *before* laser resurfacing. *All* patients are treated with preventive antiviral medication *after* laser resurfacing. Should an outbreak occur despite this preventive medication, call my office immediately to change antiviral medications.

Pigmentary changes are always possible following any type of resurfacing procedure. This can be as simple as the kind of skin lightening often experienced following a sunburn peel or more involved changes, such as the skin darkening experienced by some darker complexions. Most pigmentary changes, if they occur, are temporary and treatable. I will monitor you closely for any such pigmentation changes and initiate therapy with a skin bleaching cream if indicated.

Acne breakout can sometimes occur following resurfacing, especially in patients prone to this condition to begin with. If acne seems to be a problem after your procedure, call my office for treatment.

Scarring is a rare complication and due to a variety of factors, including a patient's own healing characteristics. If scar tissue formation seems to be occurring, call my office immediately.

Petechiae, finely distributed blood-colored "speckles" in the skin, is sometimes seen just after the skin resurfaces at 7 to 10 days. This is a temporary condition and will clear in time without treatment.

Lower eyelid "ectropion", or sagging down of the lower eyelid margin, is rarely seen after resurfacing the skin of the lower eyelid. This condition, when it occurs, is usually treatable by simply "massaging" the eyelid to keep it soft and pliable while healing continues. I will show you how to do this should the need arise.

Questions or Concerns

Careful compliance with these instructions will ensure an optimal, smooth and cosmetically appealing result from your laser resurfacing treatment. If you should have any questions not answered above, call my office at 785-823-7225 or 1-800-331-3238 and ask to speak to my office nurse.

David A. Hendrick, M.D.