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beauty

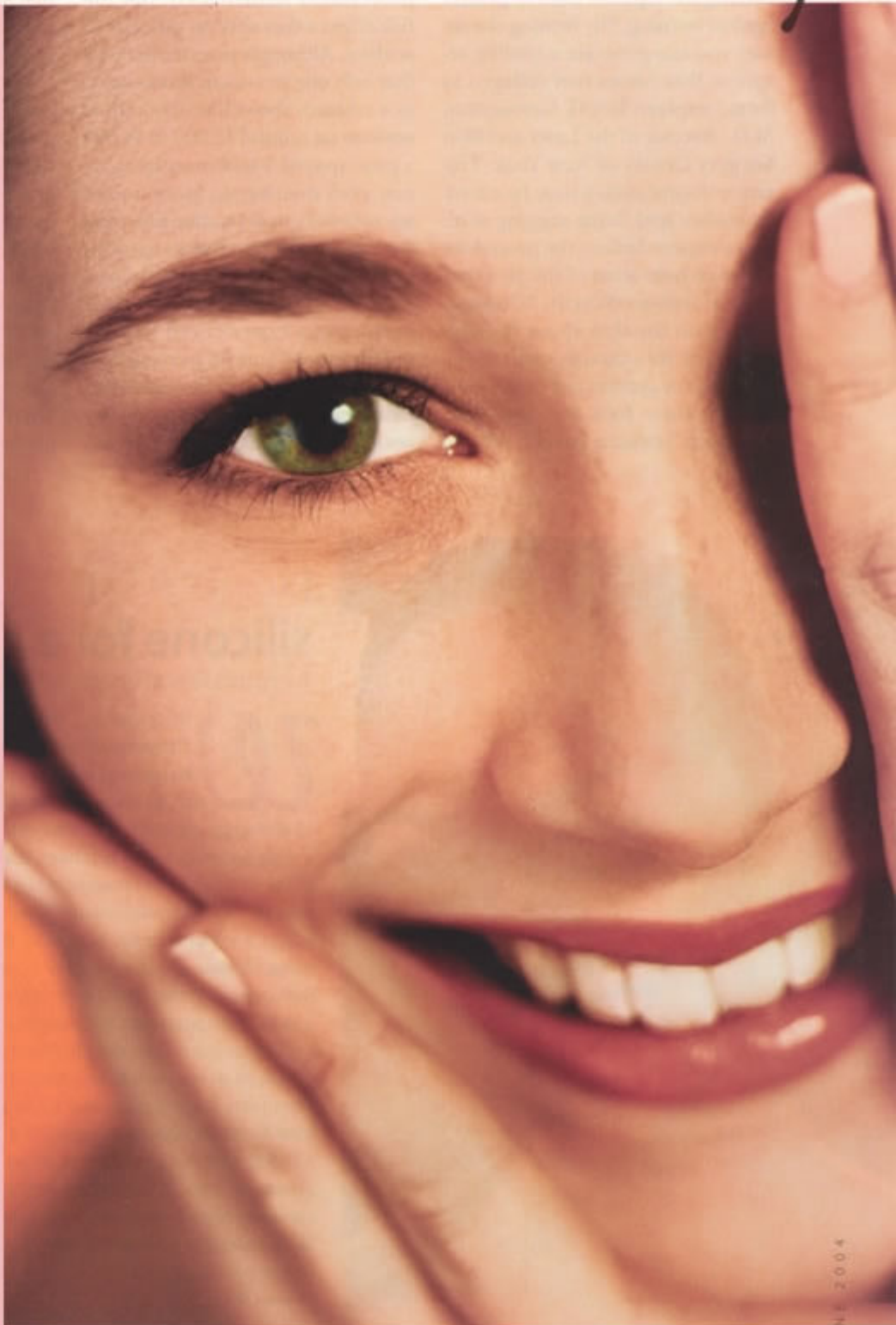
[SKIN SOLUTIONS]

the no-surgery face-lift

Can a new scalpel-free procedure give you the results you're looking for?

IF YOU'RE one of the millions of women who want to get rid of wrinkles but aren't willing to go under the knife, then a noninvasive technique called Thermage (or Thermalift), designed to tighten tissue using radio-frequency technology, may be just what you're looking for. The procedure is now being done in the offices of 700 dermatologists, plastic surgeons, and other physicians around the country, with an estimated 500 more set to receive the technology by year's end.

Here's how it works: First a numbing cream is applied to your face; then a wand like radio-frequency tool called ThermoCool TC (short for "tissue contraction") is passed over the area that needs rejuvenating. (Although Thermage has been approved only for use on skin above and



around the eyes, doctors are also using it on smile lines around the mouth.) The device delivers heat into the tissue deep beneath the skin's surface while simultaneously cooling the topmost layer to protect against burning. "By heating the tissue, you can generate a healing response that causes new collagen to form," explains Roy G. Geronemus, M.D., director of the Laser and Skin Surgery Center of New York. The new collagen makes your face look smoother and firms sagging skin. Some experts believe the procedure can even help areas of the face that are not treated directly.

"Concentrating on the skin above the eyebrow area, for example, can actually enhance the appearance of the eyes, making them look less tired and more alert," explains David Goldberg, M.D., clin-

ical professor of dermatology at Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York.

The whole thing takes less than an hour. You may notice some improvements immediately, but the full effect takes several months to achieve. Although practitioners say that only one treatment is necessary, new research shows that about three sessions (at around \$2,000 to \$4,000 a pop) spaced 3 to 4 months apart may work even better. More studies are necessary to determine how long the results will last, but a report in the journal *Lasers in Surgery and Medicine* found that 83 percent of participants experienced wrinkle improvement and 62 percent had more-lifted brows 6 months after treatment. Researchers are also investigating Thermage's effectiveness

on breasts, stomach, arms, and legs.

Some patients say their skin felt very hot during the treatment; most women experience only mild redness and are able to return to normal activities the next day. In rare cases, swelling, scabbing, and bumps occur but disappear with time.

While this new option may be exciting, it's no substitute for a surgical lift. "Though the device does tighten the skin, it's not the same degree one would see with a traditional face-lift," says Barry DiBernardo, M.D., a spokesman for the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery's Committee on Nonsurgical Procedures. "The ideal candidate is someone who needs only mild to moderate tightening." Go to www.thermage.com to find a doctor who performs the technique. ■