



## The next wave in facials

More than a mask but short of a scalpel. Can today's superfacials save your skin? By Pamela Paul

**M**y skin is abuzz, and the taste of electrified fillings swims in my mouth. This is no ordinary facial. Tracie Martyn, a New York City aesthetician to a queens real and Hollywood (Noor and Gwyneth), delivers electric currents to my face as part of her Resculpting Facial (\$387). Afterward, my cheeks look more defined, my eyes more open. Ten days later, though, I've reverted to normal.

Undeterred, I try another facial, this time from Dennis Gross, M.D., a dermatologist in New York City. His Alpha-Beta Peel (\$225) uses an acid exfoliant meant to make my skin's texture fresher and smoother. He also adds a few laser zaps to clear some dark spots. The next day, a real estate broker asks if my parents will be joining me to look at a house. I'm 33!

These days, a facial can mean more than deep cleansing and extraction. Now there's a menu of more involved treatments that boast—and often deliver a

smoother, brighter face without cutting skin or requiring recovery time. And the procedures—including electricity-based facials, peels, microdermabrasion, and laser, light and radio frequency treatments are drawing increasing numbers of women in their 20s and 30s who want more than the passing skin perks of a traditional facial. Thirty percent of patients are now under 40, reports the American Society for Dermatologic Surgery in Rolling Meadows, Illinois.

But not all trendy facial treatments are created equal. If you're tempted to get one, read this user's manual for the most popular options to find out what to expect and which ones live up to the hype.

### Electricity facials

**Best for** Helping your face look subtly tauter before a special occasion

**How they work** Aestheticians go over skin with probes that deliver mild electric currents, making facial muscles twitch and tighten. Compare it to doing biceps curls: The muscles temporarily look more toned.

**What to expect** During the treatment (also called a microcurrent or electro-lift facial), skin buzzes or quivers. There are no known side effects, and cost varies—usually \$100 to \$450, depending on extras, like a mask.

**The fine print** Does it sound as implausible as six-pack abs from a motorized belt? Some doctors agree. "There's no scientific evidence that it works," says David Goldberg, M.D., a dermatologist in New York City and New Jersey. "People get the sensation of tightening and believe they see it." Maybe, but after Martyn treated my left side, my jawline looked sharper and my eye seemed brighter. Still, "you can't keep the muscles permanently contracted," Dr. Gross adds. Your face is buff from one to five days, then it gradually relaxes.

### Superficial peels

**Best for** Getting a quick glow and smoother skin. Peels can also help lighten dark spots and freckles.

**How they work** Glycolic, lactic and/or salicylic acids are painted on to dissolve the bonds that hold skin cells together. The surface layer then easily comes off, showing healthier skin beneath.

**What to expect** A light peel tingles or slightly stings, and your complexion soon has a rosy glow. Results last a month, or six months to a year if you get a series of five treatments. You will pay \$150 to \$250 per session. *(continued on page 90)*

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**The fine print** Expecting a peel to get rid of wrinkles is like expecting Pledge to smooth out a gash in a wood table; peels work only on the surface. If you don't see results immediately, the acid concentration may be weak, and you'll need repeat treatments. Too strong, and you could appear sunburned. To avoid being a dermatologic Goldilocks searching for just right, discuss your expectations with the doctor or aesthetician.

## Microdermabrasion

**Best for** Softening rough skin and removing blackheads

**How it works** Loose crystals pass over skin at the open tip of a hollow handpiece. The tip may also be coated with the crystals. The friction removes the top layer of skin cells, and a vacuum then sucks up loosened cells, plus dirt and oil from pores.

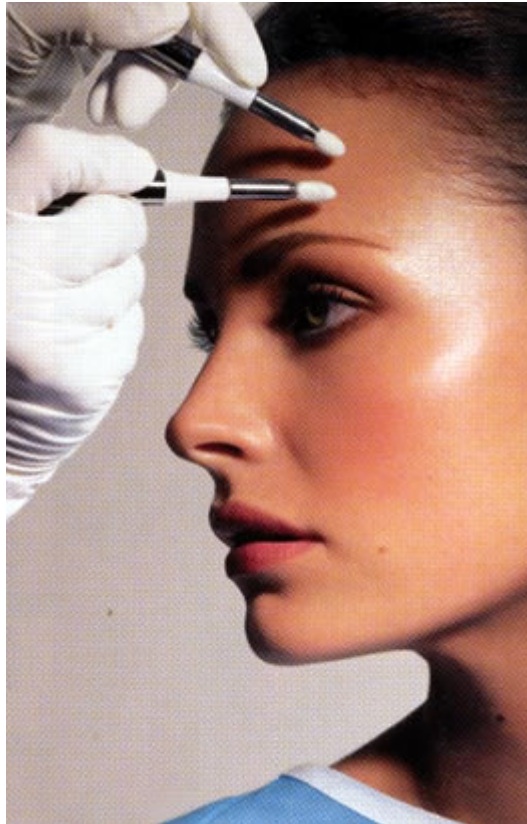
**What to expect** Microdermabrasion is like a high-powered version of a face scrub, with suction. If it hurts, speak up or else risk what looks like facial rug burn. Effects last up to a month, 6 to 12 months after a series of five. Cost: \$80 to \$250 per visit.

**The fine print** Like peels, microdermabrasion works superficially. Side effects are rare; at worst, skin looks lightly flushed for the day. But opt out if you're prone to broken blood vessels; treatment could cause more to develop, Dr. Goldberg says.

## Laser and light treatments

**Best for** Smoothing skin and fine lines; zapping broken capillaries, blotchy patches and sunspots. Treatments help skin produce healthier cells, so the results are more noticeable and last longer than with the facials listed above.

**How the work** A handpiece sends light energy to skin's



middle layer. The energy heats and breaks up collagen under wrinkles, firming lasers cause a "wound," and just as smoother and plumper skin (a scar) forms when you get a cut, newly formed collagen cells plump fine lines and make skin smoother.

**What to expect** Each "shot" feels like a rubber band snapping; you'll be flushed and may have tiny red marks for the day. Intense pulsed light devices (IPLs), used most often for visible blood vessels, usually cause less redness, says Nancy Silverberg, M.D., a dermatologist in Newport Beach, California. A full-face treatment costs \$1,000 to \$2,500. Spot treatments run \$150 to \$500 each.

**The fine print** You won't get instant gratification, Dr. Silverberg says. For these treatments, you'll need five or six sessions. Results last up to two years. The devices are safe, but set too high, they could scar or discolor skin. Set too

low, they're ineffective. Visit a doctor or medical spa, where an M.D. will evaluate your skin and adjust the settings.

## Thermage

Subtly tightening the skin of people in their 40s or 50s that has started to lose its fight against gravity

**How it works** The Thermage handpiece delivers heat to deep layers of the skin via radio frequency while a coolant protects the surface. The temperature increase can cause collagen to contract, making skin look tighter and lifted.

**What to expect** First, Thermage (also known as ThermoCool) may not work. Depending on which study you read, the percentage of people who see results is as low as 50 or as high as 80, says David Bank, M.D., a dermatologist in Mount Kisco, New York. Second, if it does work, it can take two to six months. Any result lasts a year and a half, Dr. Goldberg says. Treatment is painful (it pinches or burns), even with topical anesthetic.

**The fine print** Thermage has generated buzz, but doctors are split on its merits. Patients are, too. Some love the effects, and others, Dr. Bank says, feel they've wasted thousands of dollars (cost: \$1,000 to \$3,750). But the technology is improving. The new Polaris WR, a laser and Thermage hybrid, may be more reliable, according to Dr. Goldberg.

With any superficial, keep your expectations in check. Often, the younger your skin, the less super the results—and the more they will seem like those from any standard facial. ■

## New at-home radiance boosters

Less money, less effort, less time. That's what the latest pro-style peels promise. We tried them out.

**Neutrogena Advanced Solutions Facial Peel \$25** (12 uses), is a one-step process. Apply the gel formulation and wait 7 to 10 minutes; unlike other peels, it stops exfoliating so you can't overdo it. Tester's take "It tingled at first. After a week of using it, my skin appeared brighter."

**Lancôme Resurface Peel, \$145** (eight uses), a kit, calls for a few more steps. After cleaning skin with the prep towelette, brush on the 8 percent glycolic acid peel (in office, it's 20 to 50 percent), wait five minutes, then rub skin with soothing wipes and apply the moisturizer. Tester's take "There was no burning, and my skin felt smoother and immediately had a glow." -Jaydine Morgan