

Skin Care Tips from a LICH Expert

We've all heard the phrase "Beauty is only skin deep." Whether you and I personally agree, it is a commonly held societal belief. Why is the skin such a mark of beauty? Why is creamy, smooth skin the focus of so much attention, advertising, and product development? We fixate on it because, unless you are an anatomist, surgeon, or toxicologist, you rarely get to see below it.

The skin is by far the largest organ in the body and we ask a lot from it. It provides 12-15% of body weight and has a surface area of 1-2 meters squared. It protects us from the elements and keeps water and nutrients inside, while constantly and completely replenishing itself every 2 to 4 weeks. It is no wonder that, with time, it starts to look a little worn out.

Many office and home based therapies exist that can help replenish or rejuvenate your skin's appearance. How many of them actually work is a different story entirely. A full discussion of these various therapies — including over the counter and prescription topical products, chemical peels, dermabrasion, microdermabrasion, photofacials, ablative and non-ablative and laser treatments — would require a small text-book and more medical knowledge than the average person possesses.

Of more interest to both my patients and myself are the rapid, minimal downtime options that can be done in an office setting. These options include superficial chemical peels, microdermabrasion, photofacials, and nonablative laser treatments. Although seemingly a grand topic in scope, several general points can be made about all of these different therapies, which may help you to understand the ever-increasing choices that are available to you when caring for your skin.

No discussion of skin treatments would be complete without mentioning several key points about basic skin care. Skin reflects your overall health, so you should avoid the following:

- regular sun tanning without a sun block of spf 15 or greater;

- any nicotine containing products;
- excessive alcohol consumption.

You should also try to exercise regularly, drink plenty of non-caffeinated beverages each day, and use some kind of product each day that contains alpha-hydroxy acids (glycolic acid, lactic acid, kojic acid, etc.) and/or vitamin C. These recommendations alone will help to improve your overall skin quality tremendously. Alternatively, you can go to luxury stores or websites and randomly spend a lot of money on products that may not help a lot but will definitely cost that much.

For some of the most common skin problems — including poor skin tone, fine wrinkles, vascular lesions, unwanted hair, age spots and sunspots — several office-based procedures can be the right

choice. To understand your options further, you need to know some basic scientific facts.



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Collagen, small blood vessels, sweat glands, and sebaceous (under the skin) glands exist in the deeper layers of the skin, known as the dermis. Above this is a layer known as the epidermis, in which skin cells, known as keratinocytes, exist in various stages of development. Residing at the boundary between the epidermis and the dermis are melanocytes, which are the cells that give your skin its pigment color. The depth of all these elements determines which treatment(s) are best suited

for specific problems because each procedure targets different skin layers.

Additionally, you need to know the definition of non-ablative skin therapy. Essentially, ablative versus non-ablative relates to whether the overlying epidermis, or cover, is left intact during the procedure. If the epidermis is left undisturbed, then the treatment has to deliver energy to a specific area below the skin without causing more superficial tissue injury. Currently, certain types of lasers and devices that use ultrasonic waves can achieve this. Ablative therapies, due to the need for epidermal regeneration, require healing times of 1 to 2 weeks, and are not considered minimally invasive. The major advantage of ablative therapy is that it often achieves the desired effect with a single treatment, whereas non-ablative therapies often require multiple visits.

Spots can occasionally be treated topically with hydroquinone, Vitamin C, or retin-A containing creams. Alternatively, various forms of non-ablative laser therapy can be utilized to fade or remove these lesions entirely. Often, 1 to 4 laser sessions are required for optimal results. Laser hair removal, similarly, can be performed in a non-ablative fashion over 4 to 8 treatment sessions.

For skin conditions, such as poor skin tone or fine wrinkles, a vast array of treatment options exist. However, non-ablative therapies help much more with overall skin tone than they do with fine wrinkles. Certain types of lasers may claim better results with wrinkles, but no current medical consensus exists on these issues. Newer technologies, including light based therapies (also known as Photofacials) may give similar results to non-ablative laser therapies, but the test of time has not been applied yet.

Microdermabrasion versus superficial chemical peels is another area of patient confusion. Technically, both microdermabrasion and superficial chemical peels are ablative treatments. However, their effects are so surface based, that no extensive healing time is required. Slight redness may exist for 1 to 2 days afterwards, but it is often tolerable for patients. As with other therapies, multiple

treatments are required for lasting and optimal effects, which may vary from one patient to another.

A recent development in skin care treatment is the introduction of Fraxel™ technology. This procedure is both ablative and non-ablative, combining the best of both worlds. A single laser pulse treats a postage stamp sized area by making 1,000 points of microablation in the skin surface. The laser simultaneously delivers energy to the deeper areas through these entry points for treatment of fine wrinkles and spots. Since the ablated areas are so small, the skin cover regenerates in about 24 hours. Although relatively new and not widely available, it offers another choice for patients seeking

rapid turn-around skin enhancement.

So what is the overall message? Do your homework: Get information before your visit, ask to see before and after photographs, and find a doctor that you trust to give an opinion. But don't just jump right into treatments before trying a basic skin care regimen. You may find that taking better care of your skin daily can give you the improvements you were seeking all along.

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