



Peels

WHAT THEY ARE: Doctor- or aesthetician-administered treatments that use either a chemical (hydroxy acids or trichloroacetic acid) or mechanical process (microdermabrasion) to lift away the upper layers of the skin.

HOW THEY WORK: For a chemical peel, an acid solution is painted on the face like a mask. The higher the concentration (or the longer it is left on), the more layers of skin that will be peeled away. Microdermabrasion uses aluminum oxide crystals to buff away dead skin cells. "Many women need more exfoliation around the nose, midforehead, and chin, and with mechanical exfoliation, it's easier to focus on those areas," says Heidi Waldorf, MD, associate clinical professor of dermatology at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine. Some doctors are praising a newer system called Vibraderm, which uses vibrating metal paddles to exfoliate the skin. Eliot F. Battle Jr., MD, assistant clinical professor of dermatology at Howard University, prefers it for his African-American patients because the paddles are gentler than crystals—important for dark skin, which is vulnerable to spots when it becomes irritated or traumatized. More and more microdermabrasion techniques are also marrying exfoliation with topical treatments. The Vibraderm treatment can be followed up with a solution of antioxidants, glycolic acid, collagen, or bleaching agents. The SilkPeel or DermaSweep machines remove dead cells while delivering either hydroquinone to lighten dark spots, salicylic acid to heal acne, or hyaluronic acid to hydrate dry patches.

RESULTS YOU CAN EXPECT...

FROM LIGHT CHEMICAL PEELS OR MICRODERMABRASION: One treatment will leave the skin temporarily brighter; a series of at least four is necessary to get results that can last several months, like a smoothing of rough patches and more even pigmentation.

FROM MEDIUM OR DEEP CHEMICAL PEELS: These should be done only in a doctor's office. Because these peels reach all the way to the dermis, collagen production is stimulated with one treatment. Fine lines are effaced, and skin may even be slightly tighter.

PAIN-O-METER (1 = light pinprick and 5 = agony): Anywhere from 1 to 3. Microdermabrasion feels like a soft suction against your skin. Light peels cause mild stinging but are rinsed away within two minutes (and most doctors and aestheticians direct a small fan at the face to minimize any discomfort). Medium peels (usually trichloroacetic acid) are much more intense, so Ranella Hirsch, MD, president-elect of the American Society of Cosmetic Dermatology & Aesthetic Surgery, tells patients to take one extra-strength Tylenol beforehand and often uses a high-powered machine called a Zimmer cooler to blast cold air against the skin so that any burning sensation is slight. Deep peels (which use a substance called phenol) are rarely performed anymore (they've been replaced by lasers); they are quite painful and require complete sedation.

DOWNTIME: Your skin may be slightly pink for a day after a light chemical peel or microdermabrasion. A medium peel will leave your face red and flaky for several days. And following a deep peel, the skin will crust over and can remain red for a month or more. Gauze (like what you see at left) is often applied for the first few days to help the skin retain moisture and heal more quickly, says Alan Matarasso, MD, clinical professor of plastic and reconstructive surgery at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine at Yeshiva University, who consulted with us on creating the model photos on pages 245, 246, and 248. The deeper the peel, the higher the risks of hypopigmentation, so anything beyond a light peel is risky for women with darker skin. And only light peels are safe to use on the neck and chest (where there is a greater risk of scarring).

AVERAGE COST: \$100 to \$200 for a light peel, \$400 to \$4,000 for a medium to deep, depending on size of area being treated.

High concentrations of acid peel away several layers of skin—and can leave you red for weeks.