

Beyond the beauty aisle

Needles, lasers and peels, oh, my! They can be pricey and painful, but sometimes they're the best route to the beautiful skin you crave. Get the insider facts about what doctor's-office treatments can and can't do, then decide what's right for you. **By Jolene Edgar**

If you're ready to talk to your derm, it's smart to have a goal (and price) in mind.

Q I've done everything to get better skin, but I'm still not satisfied. Should I try a high-tech treatment?



A As SELF's beauty director, I'm asked this a lot, and I always say, Do you *need* to try a more serious treatment like needles, lasers and peels to solve your skin issues? No. *Should* you? That's a personal decision, but after you exhaust the at-home options, make sure you know what's involved before you head to the dermatologist. That's

where our guide comes in. You'll find the latest info on which procedures work best for acne, wrinkles and more, what they cost and the all-important pain factor. Here's a tip to start you off: To find a good dermatologist, go to AAD.org and type in your ZIP code. Then read on; we've made the rest of the advice about that easy! —*Elaine D'Farley*

BILL DIDOTO, INSET: CYNTHIA SEARIGHT, SEE GET-IT GUIDE.

Learn the lingo

For peace of mind, it's smart to bone up on the basics before you see your M.D. Get the scoop with this guide to cutting-edge treatments and devices you'll find at the office.

Peels Like at-home versions, in-office peels are about exfoliating. Sloughing dead cells promotes collagen production, which is why peels are often a dermatologist's go-to treatment to soften fine lines or firm skin; they can also even out pigmentation. Peels can be either liquids or gels and range in strength from gentler fruit acids to stronger surgical peels.

Lasers The name might conjure visions of lightsabers, but dermatologist-administered lasers aren't as scary as they sound. The devices shine a thin beam of light to vaporize visible blood vessels and brown spots, spur collagen production and kill acne-causing bacteria. (Depending on your needs, your doctor will set the laser to a specific intensity and color—yellow-green, for instance, fades pigment; blue helps erase acne.) Another treatment, called pulsed dye lasers (PDL), flashes the laser on skin to help ease rosacea.

Intense pulsed light If spider veins or sun spots are making you crazy, IPL is the way to go. Your dermatologist will apply a gel to conduct the special frequency of pulsed light—different from lasers—onto skin, then flash the targeted area for up to 20 minutes.

Freezers You know about Botox, but do you truly understand what it does? This FDA-approved injection (and a similar treatment called Dysport) temporarily paralyzes muscles directly below the skin's surface, leading the attached skin to relax so fine lines fade away. It's key to find a dermatologist who has experience with freezers, however, because pumping in too much can make you look stiff, frozen or emotionless, and misplaced injections can make your face look lopsided.

Fillers If you have deeper lines (ones you can not only see in your bathroom mirror but also feel with your fingers), your dermatologist may use a fine needle to inject a filler—including collagen, hyaluronic acid or even fat from other parts of your body—to plump up areas beneath the skin. Afterward, she'll press on your face with her fingers to smooth the injection sites and flatten any stray lumps.



Don't mask your fears! Be candid with your dermatologist for the best results.

Achieve the skin you want. Sure, you're curious about what a dermatologist can do, but it pays to prioritize before you put your face in her hands. To clarify your goals, fill in the blanks, then take this box to your doc.

My goal is to _____.

I am happy with my _____, but I'm curious about treatments for my _____.

(area of face, skin descriptor)

I'm willing to try _____.

(a prescription/peels/lasers/IPL/fillers/freezers/anything)

but I prefer to steer clear of _____.

(a prescription/peels/lasers/IPL/fillers/freezers/nothing)

On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being easy-breezy, 5 being nearly unbearable), I want to keep pain below a _____.

(1, 2, 3, 4, 5)

I would like to spend no more than _____ recovering _____.

(an hour/a day/three days/a week)

and _____ be willing to have (and/or pay for) treatments that require _____.

(would/would not)

multiple sessions. I don't want to spend more than \$ _____ total or spend more _____.

than _____ receiving treatments.

(an hour, two hours, six hours)

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Nervous? Ask for a numbing cream before getting an injection.

Smooth wrinkles

Consider these options if you've already tried... Vitamin A creams (such as Rx retinoids or ones with retinol) and alpha hydroxy acids, such as glycolic and lactic, which help soften wrinkles by stimulating new collagen growth; and, of course, broad-spectrum sunscreen, to fight off the free radicals and sun damage that cause lines in the first place.

For fine lines "If you begin using Botox or other freezers as soon as you notice subtle expression lines and continue as you age, you can absolutely prevent certain wrinkles from forming," says Dennis Gross, M.D., a cosmetic dermatologist in New York City. There's also nothing better for treating movement-related lines you already have: "Even in your 30s, you usually end up with 100 percent smoothing," says Patricia Wexler,

M.D., associate clinical professor of dermatology at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine.

WHAT CAN I EXPECT? You will feel a slight pinch from the needle; injection sites might be red and puffy for a few hours.

BOTOX

Sessions
1 every 3 to 6 months

Cost
\$300–\$1,100/
session

Downtime
0 days

Ouch factor
⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗

For noticeable creases Do needles make you cringe? A series of light peels or laser treatments can erase lines by boosting collagen production. You can also try subablative rejuvenation, which uses radio frequency energy to heat skin, tricking it into producing more collagen.

WHAT CAN I EXPECT? When the device is used on the mildest setting with a numbing cream, pain from subablative rejuvenation is minimal. Your skin will be pink for a few hours afterward, and you'll have to go back for several follow-up treatments.

SUBLATIVE REJUVENATION

Sessions 3 to 5

Cost \$350–\$1,500/
session

Downtime
Up to 2 days

Ouch factor
⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗

For deeper wrinkles When lines are deep enough to feel with your fingers, derms may opt to inject a hyaluronic acid–based filler, like Restylane or Juvéderm, to bulk up the area directly under wrinkles. You'll need a treatment every 6 to 12 months, but some fillers stimulate your own collagen production, helping stretch the time between injections, says David Bank, M.D., a dermatologist in Mount Kisco, New York.

WHAT CAN I EXPECT? Most hyaluronic acid fillers have pain-killing lidocaine mixed in—ask for these, as they are much less uncomfortable. You can go back to work when done, but you may experience a day or two of swelling, along with some bruising. Skip the gym for two days; raising blood pressure can exacerbate swelling.

FILLERS

Sessions
1 every 6 to 12 months

Cost
\$700–\$1,400/
session

Downtime
2 days

Ouch factor
⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗

BRILLIANT PHOTO

Lessen rosiness

Consider these options if you've already tried...

Mild cleansers and moisturizers (look for fragrance-free options with healing ceramides); anti-inflammatory ingredients, like green tea, coffeeberry and licorice; and switching out potentially irritating chemical sunblocks for gentler mineral-based formulas.

For mild redness Besides all the usual damage (sunburn, aging, skin cancer), exposure to the sun can also bring on broken capillaries—both the tangled mass underlying the redness of rosacea and the random squiggles on your nose. “Over time, the sun weakens the collagen that supports blood vessels, causing them to lose their springiness,” Dr. Bank says. “So eventually, when you get flushed—from heat, alcohol, spicy foods, racy jokes—your dilated vessels stop returning to their normal size, leaving you rosy.” Severe rosacea may call for topical prescription gels, like Finacea and Metrogel. Your doctor may also prescribe an antibiotic in pill form, such as minocycline and doxycycline (two forms of tetracycline), which help derail inflammation more effectively than over-the-counter options can.

RX GELS
Sessions
None
Cost
Varies depending on insurance
Downtime
None
Ouch factor
 ☹️☹️☹️☹️☹️



Before you resort to lasers and peels, ask about a topical prescription.

For severe redness “If prescription products don’t ease the inflammation, rosiness and bumps of rosacea, your doctor can tackle the redness with pulsed dye laser devices; patients tend to see a 70 to 90 percent improvement with three or four treatments,” says Jeffrey Dover, M.D., a dermatologist in Boston. Incidentally, these same lasers can quickly erase random non-rosacea-related capillaries, too.
WILL IT HURT? Imagine a rubber band snapping you in the face... repeatedly. Irritating, but not excruciating, right? That’s about what PDL feels like. After you receive the treatment, you’ll be red and swollen for a couple of days; using ice packs can bring some relief. And although you’ll probably feel (and look) well enough to return to work, you will want to sleep with your head elevated on a few extra pillows until the swelling subsides; doing this will help keep major puffiness at bay.

PDL
Sessions
3 or 4
Cost
\$400–\$800/session
Downtime
Up to 3 days
Ouch factor
 ☹️☹️☹️☹️☹️

For allover bumps and clogs Light chemical peels, which stay on for about five minutes, bolster the effectiveness of any Rx-strength acne drugs you’re already using. They regulate hormones and oil production, giving the meds extra oomph. Types to look for: salicylic acid peels, Jessner’s peels (salicylic and lactic acids plus resorcinol) and modified Jessner’s peels with retinoic acid. The Vitalize and Rejuvenize peels “are the least irritating and most effective I’ve found, especially for skin of color, which can react to irritation by creating dark spots,” Dr. Sundaram says. Peels can also fade the dark marks some blemishes leave behind.
WILL IT HURT? Depending on the peel, you’ll feel some warmth and tingling and look a little pink right after your treatment. In about two days, the very top layer of your skin may begin to flake off (painlessly), and continue to do so for about three days. In other words, you can live your life; you just may not look your best.

PEELS
Sessions
1
Cost
\$150–\$350/session
Downtime
1 day
Ouch factor
 ☹️☹️☹️☹️☹️

Clear up skin

Consider these options if you've already tried...

Over-the-counter products containing 5 percent bacteria-killing benzoyl peroxide; 2 percent salicylic acid, a pore declogger that quells inflammation; sulfur, a drying ingredient; and, finally, prescription retinol and birth control pills for hormonally related acne, as well as prescription retinoid creams and antibiotics.

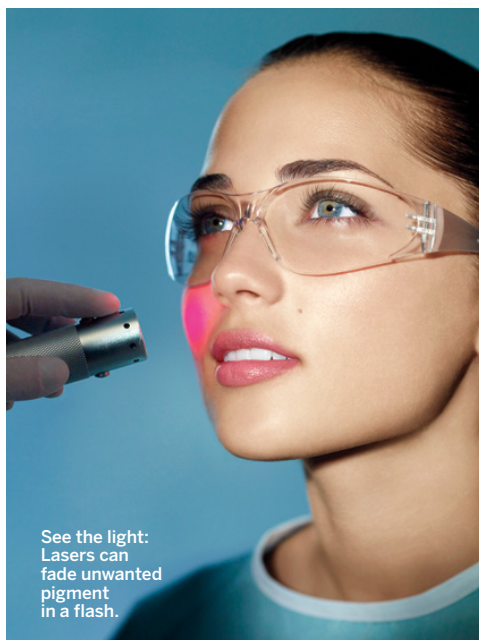
For one giant zit “A cortisone shot can be a lifesaver for someone who wakes up with a deep, painful cyst that doesn’t respond to topical medication,” says Jeannette Graf, M.D., assistant clinical professor of dermatology at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine. Injecting the anti-inflammatory medication cuts inflammation from the inside, shrinking it down in 12 to 24 hours. (Don’t use this method as your first line of defense for an annoying but painless whitehead, however.)
WILL IT HURT? As much as, say, a flu shot in your face. “You’ll feel a sting for the three to six seconds it takes to inject the drug, although certain spots, like the nose and upper lip, are more sensitive,” says Hema Sundaram, M.D., a cosmetic dermatologist in Washington, D.C. Afterward, the zit will likely be a bit swollen for a few hours but will eventually recede.

CORTISONE SHOTS
Sessions
1
Cost
\$150
Downtime
None
Ouch factor
 ☹️☹️☹️☹️☹️

For painful acne To treat the worst cases of acne, dermatologists rely on the Isolaz laser and on photodynamic therapy (PDT), which is similar to IPL. The Isolaz uses a vacuum to lift the skin gently and open pores to suction out oil; your derm will then shine a bacteria-killing light deep into pores. Seventy-five percent of patients end up acne-free after six to eight weekly treatments, Dr. Wexler says. The other option, PDT, kills bacteria and shrinks oil glands by using a blue light on skin that has been pretreated with a light-sensitizing chemical known as Levulan. “It can put even severe acne into remission for 6 to 12 months,” Dr. Bank says. Your derm will help you decide which is best for your skin.
WILL IT HURT? Isolaz is relatively painless—you’ll feel a light tugging from the suction—and it may leave your skin extra rosy for a few hours. Like IPL, PDT treatments are also often likened to rubber bands snapping on the skin—annoying but tolerable. You’ll be red and swollen for a few days, then your skin will flake and peel. What’s key: avoiding the sun for at least 36 hours, as Levulan can leave skin more vulnerable to UV rays. Our tip? Do it before a long weekend so you can hole up and heal up.

ISOLAZ Sessions 6 to 8 Cost \$300/session Downtime 1 day Ouch factor ☹️☹️☹️☹️☹️	PDT Sessions 3 to 5 Cost \$500–\$1,000/session Downtime 3 days Ouch factor ☹️☹️☹️☹️☹️
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Ditch dark spots



See the light: Lasers can fade unwanted pigment in a flash.

Consider these options if you've already tried...

A glycolic acid lotion in the morning or vitamin A cream in the evening to slough dull, pigmented cells; brightening products that contain soy, niacinamide, vitamin C, alpha arbutin or kojic acid; or prescriptions, including EpiQuin Micro (hydroquinone that's microencapsulated to curb irritation).

For sun spots Unlike freckles, sun spots don't fade naturally in the fall, but Q-switched lasers or IPL can help erase them. The treatments, which flash short bursts of laser or light on the skin, are favored by derms for banishing brown spots on even hypersensitive skin of color. They hone in on unwanted pigment without affecting the lighter skin around the spot.

WILL IT HURT? After these treatments (which, when done in one tiny area, can feel like a hot pinprick or, again, a snapping rubber band), your spots will turn red for a few hours, then dark brown for about a week, before flaking off. (So don't schedule it before a big event.)

IPL
Sessions 1 to 3
Cost \$100-\$500/ session
Downtime Up to 3 days
Ouch factor ⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗

For melasma If seasonal spots like freckles don't fade with products alone, derms can up the ante with lasers and peels. Whichever you and your doc decide on, "you need to treat pigment gradually, because if you irritate the skin, that can cause more pigment to form," Dr. Graf says. Try glycolic peels—and

staying out of the sun. Melasma (the often hormone-related splotches many women get during pregnancy) is the most difficult pigment issue to treat. Some derms suggest up to six sessions of fractional resurfacing using the Fraxel Re:Store Dual 1927 laser to create even-toned skin.

WILL IT HURT? If you decide to get fractional resurfacing, a thick layer of numbing cream, applied an hour beforehand, will slightly ease pain, Dr. Bank explains. You will be red and swollen for about three days. You can probably go to the office, but you might want to skip face-to-face meetings or any big presentations.

FRAXEL
Sessions 2 to 6
Cost \$1,000-\$1,500/ session
Downtime Up to 3 days
Ouch factor ⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗

click! SEE HOW YOU'D LOOK with fewer wrinkles—without any needles or lasers. Upload your photo, click on "Antiaging" and play at Makeover.Self.com.

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