

Is Laser Resurfacing Actually Good For Your Skin?

Some professionals are divided on whether this treatment is OK for all skin types—so we spoke to a derm to get all the details

By Souzan Michael Galway

FLARE



(Photo: Getty)

*No matter where you get your beauty info from—whether it's magazines, social media or good ol' word of mouth—it's safe to say that the abundance of sources and information available at any given time has made things, well, pretty confusing. With so much info at our fingertips, it can be tricky to differentiate between what's factual and what isn't. That's where we come in. We've tapped the top pros in every area of the beauty industry, from hair care to skincare to makeup and more, to bust some common myths and shed light on what you *actually* need to know.*

Ah, exfoliation. It's the skincare topic on the tip of everyone's tongue these days—and for good reason. Between relatable memes about our collective first foray into the world of exfoliation (ahem, St. Ives Apricot Scrub) to highly effective blends of our forever faves, glycolic, lactic and salicylic acid (we love Omorovicza 's new Acid Solution, which launches October 1, and Versed Skincare's The Shortcut Overnight Facial Peel), the possibilities when it comes to achieving a great at-home exfoliation are at a truly impressive all-time high.

In fact, celebrity esthetician Joanna Czech —who has worked with the likes of Kim Cattrall, Jennifer Anniston, Kim Kardashian West and so many other A-listers—recently told us that she's *such* a believer in at-home treatments that she actually prefers them over laser treatments. Her stance? "It's not necessarily quick fixes that work. I know many plastic surgeons will not love this, but [I believe that] consistency of massage and application of proper products is what's super important [for maintaining skin health]."

But as with many things, there are different sides and viewpoints. Many dermatologists love and stand by lasers' ability to resurface and exfoliate skin, effectively targeting everything from fine lines to pigmentation, scarring and redness. At the end of the day, the choice is yours to make, and to help you make it we asked a dermatologist to answer some of our most burning questions about laser treatments, and set the record straight, once and for all.

True or False: Lasers weaken the skin barrier over time

False. According to Dr. Sheetal Sapra, Director of Dermatology at ICLS, "lasers use low-level light or heat to remove the surface level of skin with minimal damage." Sound scary? It's not. "This microscopic injury in the skin's surface stimulates the natural healing process, allowing the body to replace damaged or dead skin with new, healthy skin," says Sapra.

But as is the case with any skin treatment, it's important to practice moderation and start slow to see how your skin will react. This is also why it's important to work with a professional you trust, who will determine the best course of action for your needs and skin type. (More on that in a bit.)

True or False: Chemical exfoliants are a better and gentler way to resurface skin

It depends on how you use them—and getting it right can be tricky. "There are many variables that are harder to control with chemical [exfoliants]," says Dr. Sapra —"namely the depth of resurfacing." While chemical exfoliants are certainly a valuable addition to your skincare routine—and one we've recommended for everything from treating milia to premature signs of aging and sun spots —there can be some trial and error involved. From making sure you're using formulations with the right percentage of active ingredients (too low and you won't see results; too high and you risk seriously damaging your skin barrier) to figuring out which other products should and shouldn't be used with your chemical exfoliants, getting the process right can feel like a balancing act—though the payoff can certainly be worth it. "With lasers there's much more precision and control, and [your dermatologist is] able to create reproducible settings for more accurate results each time," says Dr. Sapra. It's really just about figuring out what works for your skin, lifestyle and wallet. (Laser treatments aren't exactly the most budget-friendly option.)

True or False: Laser resurfacing doesn't work on all skin types

Used to be true. In the past, lasers weren't presented as a great option for darker skin tones because of the risk of pigmentation change and scarring. In fact, for decades, the lasers that targeted pigmentation would actually damage dark skin and were therefore only used on lighter skin tones. "In darker skin tones there is always the increased risk of pigmentation when using light-based therapies like laser skin resurfacing," explains Dr. Sapra. But today, new, sophisticated devices, as well as improved methods of using older existing ones, have made laser skin resurfacing much more widely applicable.

When using lasers on darker skin tones, you'll need a laser with "a long wavelength [rather than one that provides high bursts of energy] and a highly experienced provider. When considering such a procedure, it's important to see a board-certified dermatologist with access to a suite of technologies to suit your skin type," says Dr. Sapra.

As for sensitive skin types? "These technologies can be used on sensitive skin without the same risks," explains Dr. Sapra. "But the after-care treatment may differ based on skin's needs." (Read: potentially longer healing time and extra, *extra* hydration.)

True or False: Laser skin resurfacing is painful

It depends. "Most patients can easily tolerate the sensation of mild resurfacing, or removing the top layer of skin," explains Dr. Sapra. "The deeper the resurfacing, the more sensitive the procedure becomes depending on the patient's pain tolerance. Patients may choose to have topical, local or—in the case of deep resurfacing—general anesthetic."