

Laser Resurfacing

Information and advice for patients

Birmingham Regional Skin Laser Centre

What is laser resurfacing?

Laser resurfacing is a treatment to help reduce the appearance of raised birthmarks, moles, acne scarring and sun-damaged skin.

It can also help to reduce and reshape the nose of people who have rhinophyma. The type of laser used is a carbon dioxide (CO₂) laser.

The number of treatments you are offered will depend on your condition and the amount of NHS funding that is available. Your consultant will discuss this with you.

What are the benefits of laser resurfacing?

The benefit of laser resurfacing is that it is the most effective non-surgical treatment for smoothing the appearance of acne scars and other skin conditions. Laser resurfacing is less likely to cause scarring than surgery because it removes the upper layer of skin without cutting it. You will be able to see the results quickly and may continue to see improvement as the weeks progress. For some people the treatment can also help rebuild their confidence.

How does laser resurfacing work?

The laser uses an intense beam of light which evaporates water molecules around the skin cells. This removes the top thin layers of skin (the epidermis), and exposes the deeper layer of skin (the dermis). The laser then heats up the deeper layer which stimulates the production of collagen. Collagen helps to repair the damaged skin. Collagen is a protein in the skin which gives good texture, shape, elasticity and suppleness.

What are the risks of laser resurfacing?

- If you have had acne there is a risk of acne developing in the area that has been treated, so you may be prescribed low dose antibiotics to take for 2 or 3 months after the procedure to help prevent this.
- If you get cold sores these can occur after treatment, especially if the treatment has been around your mouth. To reduce the risk of this happening your consultant may advise you to use an anti-viral medication for 7 days before and 7 days after the procedure, which you can buy from your local pharmacy.

Changes in skin pigment (colour)

Changes in the skin pigment (colour) can occur in people who have this treatment. The skin can become lighter or darker.

- Darkening of the skin (hyper-pigmentation) is the most common change to the skin colour and is more likely to occur in people who have darker skin or who tan easily. Hyper-pigmentation can occur in up to 37 out of 100 people who have this treatment, but will usually fade naturally in the next 6 months.

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- Whitening of the skin (hypo-pigmentation) can also occur. This occurs in up to 16 out of 100 patients and can be permanent.

Scarring

Scarring can occur in the areas treated. Following the advice on page 6 under 'caring for the treated area' will help reduce this.

Infection

There is a risk of developing an infection in the area of skin that has been treated. You will be given an antibiotic ointment to apply to the area to prevent this. Following the advice on page 6 under 'caring for the treated area' will also help to reduce this risk.

Are there any alternatives to this treatment?

An alternative to this treatment is surgery to cut away the affected skin. However you are more likely to develop an infection or scarring after surgery.

Another alternative may be to conceal or camouflage the mark with special covering creams or make-up. You can go to the Changing Faces website for advice on skin camouflage creams and services.

What will laser resurfacing feel like?

Most people feel some discomfort during the treatment, which they describe as being like 'a warm elastic band hitting your skin', but most do not find it too painful. If you are concerned about this you can talk to the consultant about using a local anaesthetic cream to numb the area and they can give you a prescription for this.

Some people find the procedure too painful even with a local anaesthetic and may need their treatment under a general anaesthetic (where you are put to sleep), especially if a large area is being treated. If you are having a general anaesthetic you will be given more information about the risks of this.

Preparing for laser resurfacing

- Please make sure your consultant is aware of any medications you are taking as some medications may need to be stopped before the treatment.
- Avoid exposure to the sun for 4 – 6 weeks before this treatment as sun exposure may increase your risk of skin pigmentation changes after treatment.
- Please purchase sun block with an SPF of 30 or above as you will need to use this after your treatment.
- Avoid using fake tan for 1 week before the treatment.

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- Remove all make-up and moisturising creams before the treatment.
- If there is hair in the area that is going to be treated please shave it before you come to the hospital.
- If you are having local anaesthetic for the treatment please come to the hospital 1 hour before your appointment to have the local anaesthetic cream applied and allow it time to work. You can also take two 500mg Paracetamol tablets approximately 1 hour before the treatment to relieve discomfort.
- If you are having a general anaesthetic for the treatment you will be sent a letter telling you where to go and what time to arrive.

During the treatment

The treatment will be carried out by a consultant and takes about 30 minutes – 1 hour, depending on the size of the area being treated. This is what happens:

1. When you arrive you will be asked to change into a theatre gown.
2. If you are having a local anaesthetic for the treatment some local anaesthetic cream will be applied to the area.
3. Your consultant will make sure you understand the treatment, answer any questions you have and ask you to sign a consent form.
4. A nurse will take you to the skin theatre.
5. Once in theatre you will be asked to lie down. If you are having a general anaesthetic this will be given now. If you are having a local anaesthetic more anaesthetic will be injected into the area being treated.
6. Protective goggles will be placed over your eyes to protect them from the laser. If the area being treated is on your face these will be blackout goggles which you will not be able to see through.
7. The laser will be directed to the area being treated and applied to the skin. The consultant may pass the laser over your skin a number of times and will wipe your skin with a wet gauze. As the laser is passed across your skin the water molecules around your skin cells evaporate which causes smoke/fumes

After the treatment

Immediately after your treatment the treated area will be red, swollen and hot to touch. Once the anaesthetic has worn off the area will also feel sore. Painkillers such as paracetamol can help relieve any pain; follow the dosage instructions on the packet.

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Going home

You will be able to go home on the same day as your treatment. If you have had a general anaesthetic a responsible adult will need to collect you from the hospital and it is advisable to have someone with you for the next 24 hours. You must not drive yourself home after a general anaesthetic.

Most people prefer to take a week off work after having this treatment but you can return to work earlier if you feel able to take care of your skin there.

Caring for the treated area

- You can remove the dressing 24 hours after the treatment (unless it falls off before this). You will be advised if you need to come back to the clinic to have your dressing changed by a nurse.
- The area treated will look like it has been burnt and will leak a clear straw-like fluid for a few days; this is normal. It will then start to scab 3 – 7 days after treatment. Do not pick the scab as this could lead to infection or cause a scar.
- Keep the treated area clean and moist by dabbing it with sterile cleaning fluid and gauze which you will be given by the nurse.
- You will also be given an antibiotic ointment to apply to the area twice a day for 5 – 7 days.
- If the area is swollen you can relieve this at night by sleeping with extra pillows to elevate the area.
- Avoid exfoliating and using any soaps or perfumed products on the treated area until it has fully healed.
- Avoid swimming and using a sauna or steam room until the area has fully healed.
- If your skin feels dry or tight apply Vaseline to it to help keep it moist.
- Avoid exposure to the sun and ultraviolet light and apply sun block with an SPF of 30 or above every day for 6 months after treatment.

Follow-up

You will be sent an appointment for a review with your consultant 8 weeks after your treatment. Your consultant will check how the area has healed and discuss further treatment with you.

Symptoms to report

Please contact us as soon as possible if the area becomes increasingly red, swollen, painful or hot, or leaks any fluid or puss that is not clear or straw-like. These symptoms may indicate that the wound has become infected and you may need antibiotics. Outside of our working hours please contact your GP.

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How to contact us

If you have any concerns or questions please contact:

Birmingham Regional Skin Laser Centre

0121 507 6637 or 6639

Monday – Friday, 9am – 4pm (except bank holidays)

Further information

Changing Faces

www.changingfaces.org.uk/Skin-Camouflage

The British Association of Skin Camouflage

www.skin-camouflage.net

Tel: 01254 703 107

Monday – Friday, 10am – 4pm

For more information about our hospitals and services please see our websites www.swbh.nhs.uk and www.swbhengage.com or follow us on Twitter @SWBHnhs and Facebook www.facebook.com/SWBHnhs.

Sources used for the information in this leaflet

- S.W. Lanigan, 'Lasers in Dermatology', 2000
- K. Nouri, 'Lasers in Dermatology and Medicine', November 2011

If you would like to suggest any amendments or improvements to this leaflet please contact the communications department on 0121 507 5420 or email: swb-tr.swbh-gm-patient-information@nhs.net



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