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Dermatology Update

by Dr. Debra Price

Questions and Answers

Unwanted hair

In your opinion, is laser hair removal the best way to get rid of unwanted hair?

Laser hair removal is the most efficient mechanism to remove hair. There are many different lasers that can accomplish this task. The optimum choice of laser depends on the patient's skin color and hair color. Individuals with dark hair and light skin respond most favorably to shorter wavelength lasers such as the ruby and alexandrite lasers. Individuals with darker skin types do better with longer wavelength lasers. To date, no laser is particularly effective in removing blonde hair. Individuals considering laser hair removal should choose a physician with experience using lasers for hair removal and other indications. These devices can only be operated by physicians and physician assistants under the supervision of a physician.

Peels: what's the difference?

What is the difference between a physician's peel and an esthetician's peel?

The difference lies in the strength of the peel and the potential depth of the treatment. Esthetician's peels are superficial epidermal peels. Physicians perform similar peels for treatment of hyperpigmentation and acne but can also perform deeper peels for treatment of photoaged skin and wrinkles. Estheticians should be cautioned however that even superfi-

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cial peels can sometimes extend deeper if the patient's skin barrier is compromised, if the client is using Retin-A™ or a retinal product. Estheticians should question all patients regarding topical drug use, pregnancy, prior Accutane™ use or a history of herpes simplex infection before performing any peel. Individuals who have used Accutane in the past year should not be peeled. Individuals with a history of herpes simplex infection on the face should be prophylaxed with an antiviral agent such as Zovirax®, Famvir® or Valtrex prior to and following peeling. You should advise such clients to obtain a prescription from their physician.

When to use a peel

What esthetics problems do peels counteract?

Peels are effective in the treatment of acne, hyperpigmentation and photoaging. Beta hydroxy peels are particularly effective for the treatment of acne. A variety of

superficial peeling agents including alpha hydroxy peels, beta hydroxy peels, Jessners solution, and combination peels are effective in treating hyperpigmentation and photoaging. Combining chemical and mechanical peels (microdermabrasion) is also effective.

Performing effective peels

How can estheticians perform effective peels if they are limited to the superficial layers of the epidermis?

In many instances superficial peeling is preferable to deeper peeling, particularly in the treatment of hyperpigmentation in darker complected individuals and acne. In the latter situation, deeper peels can often cause postinflammatory hyperpigmentation and actually worsen rather than improve the condition. Beta hydroxy peels are superficial peels that are selectively comedolytic and highly effective as an adjunct in the treatment of acne. However, any patient with significant acne should also be advised to seek consultation with a dermatologist for medical therapy to enhance therapeutic results.

At-risk moles

At what point should one consider having a mole removed?

Any mole that undergoes change in size color or border or becomes symptomatic should be
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evaluated by a dermatologist. Moles that are irregular in color or border should be evaluated regardless of a perceived change. Individuals with a history of sunburns in childhood, light complected skin, an increased number of moles or a family history of melanoma or dysplastic nevi should also be evaluated.

Treating broken blood vessels

How should an esthetician treat small broken blood vessels on the cheeks and nose?

Laser is the most effective mechanism to treat widespread erythema (redness) and facial telangiectasia. Individuals with this problem should be referred to a physician experienced in the use of lasers. Individuals with a few isolated telangiectasia can be treated via light electrocoagulation, but in most instances laser removal is more effective.

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Treating a dark, eye contour

Several of my clients have darker skin underneath their eyes. What products do you recommend for reducing these darker areas?

Dark circles below the eyes result from vascular dilatation, hyperpigmentation, skin atrophy and wrinkling. One should assess the etiology in each case prior to recommending therapy. Individuals who have primarily dilated vessels may improve the condition with the use of vitamin K cream, topical vitamin C, and vasoconstrictive agents such as chamomile tea bags and cool packs. Individuals with hyperpigmentation, wrinkling and skin atrophy may benefit from Renova® cream, topical vitamin C, and a moisturizing eye cream. Superficial peeling and Botox® injections can also be helpful for this condition.

Blackhead prevention and removal

What do you think is the best means for the prevention and removal of blackheads?

The daily use of a topical retinoid is the most effective mechanism to prevent and treat blackheads. Retinoids include, Retin-A®, Differin®, and Tazarac®. Retinal products are also effective for individuals who cannot tolerate these more effective prescription remedies. The formulation chosen depends on the patient's skin type. The addition of a salicylic acid lotion and or wash can also enhance results. Weekly use of Biore for physical pore extraction is also helpful.

Peeling fingernails

Many of my clients complain of peeling fingernails. What products do you recommend to help this problem?

Peeling fingernails are generally the result of dehydration. The best mechanism to improve nail hydration is to apply a topical urea or alpha hydroxy acid moisturizer in conjunction with an occlusive moisturizer such as Vaseline® or Aquaphor®. The daily use of a clear nail polish is also helpful to retard water loss. However one should avoid frequent removal of the polish with a solvent such as acetone since this will dehydrate the nail plate further and exacerbate the problem. ■

Debra Price, M.D., graduated from New York University School of Medicine and interned at New York University Medical Center. She is a diplomate of the American Board of Dermatology and is an assistant professor at University of Miami's department of dermatology and cutaneous surgery. An author of several scientific papers, Dr. Price is an award-winning dermatologist and past president of the Miami Dermatologic Society, in Florida. She has a private practice in Kendall, FL. To reach Debra Price, M.D., please call (305) 670-1111.