

Procedures

Peels

What are the issues?

As we age, our skin thins and loses its elasticity; fine wrinkles and irregularities develop. Sun or environmental exposure and smoking accelerate these changes. Although true laxity of the brow, cheeks, jowls and neck are treated with surgery, this does not generally address the textural and pigmentary changes on the skin surface. These are best treated with chemical, mechanical or laser resurfacing procedures. Chemical peels help improve the youthful appearance and texture of facial skin.

What can the procedure achieve?

The procedure aims to resurface the skin providing a softer and fuller texture, with less superficial scaling and fine lines, and a more even and lighter pigmentation. The chemicals remove the superficial layers of skin to reveal more youthful skin beneath. The achievable benefits depend on the individual patient and the depth of the peel used.

Some peels, for example, fruit acid (AHA, alpha hydroxyl acid) or ICP (Innovation Concept Peel – salicylic acid) peels, only work on the epidermis (the top layer of the skin). They therefore provide a modest and temporary result, but offer a quicker recovery. They work by altering the acidity of the superficial skin layers resulting in a range of effects, from simple swelling to exfoliation.

Deeper peels, for example TCA (trichloroacetic acid), penetrate into the superficial or mid-dermis (beneath the epidermis) and produce a more substantial effect which depends upon the exposure time and concentration of the solution used. These deeper peels are associated with a longer recovery time and more potential for complications.

The more aggressive phenol peels have re-emerged as a powerful way to resurface widespread and deep facial lines. They require a general anaesthetic and weeks of post-operative care similar to laser resurfacing. Laser has largely replaced chemicals for deeper peels because of its improved safety, ease of use and less detrimental effect on skin pigmentation. However, superficial chemical peels are increasingly popular.

Other factors affect the depth of the resulting peel. These include skin thickness, surface grease or dirt, skin hydration and temperature, exposure time to the chemical, and whether occlusive dressings are used during the peel.

The depth of the peel required depends on the condition of the skin being treated. An important consideration is the length of time you are prepared to accept for recovery. The deeper the peels the longer the recovery required.

What does the procedure involve?

We commonly use the Innovation Concept Peel (ICP). This has an excellent safety profile and can be used on all skin types. Unlike many other agents, no prior skin preparation is required. It is not a painful procedure and has a minimal recovery time. Make-up can be worn during the recovery period.

The peel is undertaken as an outpatient and lasts approximately three weeks. The skin is cleansed and the peel evenly applied with further application over areas of particular concern. The patient leaves the department with the 'mask' intact and is asked to remove this at a particular time after application, dependant on skin type and the desired result, usually two to eight hours. The skin may be a little red initially and some mild peeling may occur over the next few days. A comprehensive skin care programme lasting four weeks is then followed with written instructions and all materials provided.

The ICP peel is not painful. However, for some deeper peels, it may be desirable to take an anti-inflammatory painkiller, such as ibuprofen, one or two hours prior to treatment. In addition, you should wash your skin the night before and the morning prior to treatment and apply no make-up or moisturisers. Unlike the more superficial peels, the use of Phenol generally necessitates a general anaesthetic.

What is right for me?

The ideal patient for chemical peels has many fine lines but minimal facial droopiness as this will not be corrected without surgery. Patients with fair skin colouring are less prone to hyperpigmentation (darkening) of the skin following the procedure. Fair skin on the other hand is more likely to develop hypopigmentation (lightening) afterwards, especially after deeper peels.

You should consider the time you are prepared to take for recovery and the results you are hoping to achieve so your surgeon can tailor your treatment appropriately.

What are the limitations?

Outpatient chemical peels potentially improve fine facial lines, superficial textural and pigmentary irregularities. Their action and recovery are deliberately targeted only on the superficial or mid-depth of the skin. They are not a substitute for surgery to treat general laxity of the facial tissues, nor for deep chemical peels (phenol) or laser resurfacing for deep facial lines.

What are the risks?

The main consideration relates to providing a peel that will heal quickly, as expected and without any scarring. To ensure this you must inform your surgeon of any history of herpetic infection such as cold sores, and follow the pre and post-treatment instructions closely. Cold sores may occur following treatment and prophylactic antiviral medication may be prescribed. Superficial peels are associated with a minimal risk of scarring. TCA and Phenol peels are deeper and risk permanent scarring.

Depending upon the chemical agent used and your skin type, you may develop areas of skin lightening (hypopigmentation) or darkening (hyperpigmentation) after treatment. Your surgeon will discuss these risks with you fully.

Deep Phenol peels can be associated with heart rhythm problems and you must let your surgeon know if you have any history of heart problems.

What can I expect afterwards?

For the ICP peel, you will be instructed to remove the peel mask at a particular time with the aid of a foaming gel. The following day you may experience redness and itchiness of the skin. A soothing skin recovery cream can be applied if this is the case. A regular twice daily routine of application of the foaming gel and recovery cream is required until day five. During this time, the redness should have receded and any peeling occurred. There then follows a regular skin care routine taking you up to 4 weeks. At all times it is essential that you apply sun block or make-up with SPF included.

Some peels leave a light frosting of the skin immediately afterwards. Skin shedding, however, should not occur until later. Redness for the first few days is followed by peeling for the subsequent two to three days. With deeper peels, the redness can persist for a number of weeks.

A small number of people may benefit from a further application of the peel. Superficial peels can be repeated regularly but deeper peels require a year between treatments.

Long-term skin maintenance with emollient, and sun protection when necessary, is recommended.

Contact Us

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