

Beauty is only skin deep – but that’s deep enough

Reporter Returns for More Laser “Fun”

By Joelle Klein

As you may have read, I visited the UCH Visage Center at Park Meadows back in September thinking I had scored a cushy assignment: get a facial treatment and write about it. But, instead of something relaxing and soothing, I got my face laser tagged.

Nonetheless, I recently decided to return – hoping it wouldn’t be for more punishment.



No pain, no gain. Reporter Joelle Klein undergoes the last of three laser treatments and proclaims the experience worth it.

To recap: Michelle Young, the Visage Center’s aesthetician, prescribed the laser skin resurfacing, which uses the Lux1540, a “fractional non-ablative laser.” She thought the treatment would have the most beneficial and long-lasting benefits for my skin, although she cautioned the results would be subtle and slow in coming.

There was nothing subtle about the first uncomfortable treatment, and I almost didn’t return for a follow-up. But I was curious to see if my skin would improve with the recommended three treatments. Besides, my skin healed quickly and, as with so many other things (like childbirth), I forgot the pain. So I went back five weeks later.

Properly prepared. I’m not sure if it’s because I dosed myself with Advil prior to this appointment or I was prepared for what lay ahead, but this session wasn’t nearly as uncomfortable. In fact, it was downright tolerable. Young performed the exact same procedure as the first time: 30 minutes of numbing cream and then three passes of the laser over my entire face. I braced myself for the passes to become increasingly painful or uncomfortable, as they did the first time, but they didn’t live up to my dreaded expectations.

And the redness afterward subsided even more quickly than it did in September. I was sent home with the same list of simple instructions: rest and don’t wear makeup or use any type of facial product for 72 hours. This time, I planned ahead and didn’t have a social event until later in the week.

About a week after the second treatment, I noticed that my skin looked better – a lot better. It felt dewy and more youthful. The texture looked tighter, the surface brighter. At the risk of sounding vain, my skin was, I dare say, radiant. And the compliments started coming in: “Your skin looks great, what did you do?” and “Are you using something new? Your skin looks beautiful.”

Although five weeks seemed like a long time to see results, I was pretty happy. “Because it’s so deep, collagen takes a lot of time to build,” explained Young. “What you’ll start to see other than the tone and texture is that when you touch your skin, it’ll feel plumper. You’ll notice it feels firmer.” And it does.

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Not a charm. Per Michelle's advice, I scheduled my third and final appointment four weeks later, about a week before I was scheduled to go to Mexico. That way, she explained, the sun exposure wouldn't interfere with treatment at all.

Because my skin was doing so well, and I was pleased with the results, she ratcheted up the laser because, she said, it was my last appointment. Put it this way: after the final treatment, I was pretty glad it was my final treatment. I felt a little puffier and redder than the last time.

Michelle concentrated on explaining the plus side. I would continue to see gradual improvement for up to 12 months after my initial treatment, she said. Until about August, she added, I'll keep noticing better-looking skin. And then after that, the treatment should last anywhere from three to five years, she promised.

And there was always the option of additional maintenance. "There are things you can do in the meantime, like chemical peels and other minor procedures to keep up your results," she told me. "But at this point your skin looks beautiful. You just need to maintain your skin by exfoliating to keep those healthy cells generated."

Cosmetic appeal. But as smooth and radiant as my skin was looking and feeling, I was still a little preoccupied with the few brown spots that freckled my newly glowing skin. I was planning to stop nursing my 11-month-old daughter shortly, which was the hold-up for any brown spot treatment, so I wanted to know what the next steps regarding that issue were.

First, Young said, I'd have to use a skin lightener like hydroquinone for a month to turn off the melanin production in my skin. Melanin is a natural substance that gives pigment to skin and hair, and is more abundant in people with darker skin, like myself. When I'm ready, Young instructed me, she could write a prescription for such a product and I could pick it up at the Visage Center.

After using hydroquinone twice a day for a month, she added, I could choose from a variety of chemical peels. The least aggressive is a lactic acid peel, but Young prefers slightly more aggressive peels that involve a combination of lactic, salicylic, glycolic and retinoic acids. These included name-brand facials, such as Obaji and Jessner peels. With the combination acid peels there would be some peeling and sloughing off of the first few layers of skin, she warned, but no significant downtime.

Young's recommendation was a series of three to four peels, administered over a period of time so that I could still attend kid and social events.

Bottom line: the three laser treatments were worth the discomfort. As for the chemical peels, I must admit I'm vain enough about my skin and appearance to give them a try. Stay tuned.