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DECEMBER 2008

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# BRIGHT IDEAS

**The space-age laser and light machines that dermatologists use to obliterate wrinkles, acne, and unwanted hair have been shrunken and simplified—and they're coming to a bathroom near you. By Laurel Naversen Geraghty**

**M**aybe it's because we're lazy. Maybe it's because we're cheap. Actually, it's probably both—and that's why we love it when dermatologist-office treatments (hello, microdermabrasion and glycolic acid peels) become available at home. Too bad our favorite services involve huge, expensive machines like lasers and Intense Pulsed Light that not even Jane Jetson could dream of using at home, right?

Wrong. As it turns out, the space-age laser, light, and heat therapies that dermatologists have long employed to eradicate acne, wrinkles, and body hair have finally been scaled down, bringing us

one step closer to replicating the doctor's office in our bathrooms. Many of the home gadgets, which run from \$250 to \$1,000, are even receiving accolades from doctors, though they caution that the machines require time, patience, and dutiful maintenance to work—and even then aren't likely to rival in-office results. "When added to your regular skin-care regimen, these devices can have a positive impact," says Jason Pozner, a plastic surgeon in Boca Raton, Florida, who is coediting a textbook on lasers and laser-like devices. We enlisted the experts to decipher which machines are worth their wattage—and their price tags—because you have the right to be lazy and cheap, too.

A woman is lying on her back on a futuristic spa bed. The bed is surrounded by several jets of water, some of which are spraying water onto her. The scene is lit with warm, orange-yellow light, creating a relaxing and futuristic atmosphere. The woman is wearing a dark, short-sleeved dress and sandals. Her hair is styled in a short, wavy bob. The spa bed has a textured, perforated surface, and the jets are integrated into the structure. The overall aesthetic is sleek and modern, suggesting a high-tech spa experience.

The anti-aging GentleWaves device may soon be available for home use. Duchesse satin dress by Chanel. Silk-and-velvet sandals by Pierre Hardy. Hair: Paolo Ferreira. Makeup: Maki. Model: Olga Kurylenko. Fashion editor: Slobhan Bonnouvier. Details, see Credits page.

## ANTI-AGING LED

It was a magical moment when dermatologists found that simply sitting in front of a screen of yellow or infrared light-emitting diodes (LEDs) could reduce fine lines, increase collagen production, and smooth skin. A single treatment takes anywhere from 35 seconds (GentleWaves) to 40 minutes (Omnilux) and costs about \$100. Research has shown that over eight sessions, yellow LEDs raise collagen levels in the skin by 28 percent and reduce

large LED screens patients sit in front of at dermatologists' offices, home devices are small—with only a few dozen LEDs compared to the thousands found in professional systems—and can treat only one area of the face at a time (a full-face session takes 15 to 30 minutes). A faster version is in development: L'Oréal and Light BioScience, the maker of GentleWaves, may release a home version of the yellow-light GentleWaves system. "It's the same technology" as the one offered in doctors' offices, and it has received FDA

# One home hair-removal laser has shown a 70 percent reduction in fuzz after two treatments.

wrinkling by about 10 percent, while red and infrared wavelengths smooth wrinkles by an average of 36 percent and increase elasticity by 16 percent.

**AT HOME:** There are dozens of anti-aging LEDs on the market, but dermatologists are partial to three that mimic the exact light frequencies used in office treatments: Tända's Professional Skincare System (which contains a red LED and costs \$395; the same device also comes with a blue light to target acne), the Omnilux New-U, and PerriconeMD Light Renewal Skin Rejuvenation Therapy (they use combinations of red, near-red, and infrared light and are safe to use on the skin around the eyes; \$299 and \$335, respectively). No home LED system can boast published results showing precisely how long it takes to see improvements or what sort of payoff can be expected. But because the professional-strength versions of Tända, Omnilux, and PerriconeMD have proven their mettle in dermatologists' offices, the home versions are likely to deliver results, experts say, if given enough time. "Most machines are agonizingly slow, whether they're in-office or at home—it's like watching grass grow," says **Pozner**. Home versions may be even more painstaking: In contrast to the

clearance for use on wrinkles around the eyes, says David McDaniel, assistant professor of clinical dermatology and plastic surgery at Eastern Virginia Medical School, who developed the system. But for the quickest and most effective results, Pozner recommends combining LEDs with a topical retinoid such as retinol or Renova. "In this case, the more you throw at the skin, the greater the results will be," he says.

## LASER HAIR REMOVAL

By heating and destroying hair follicles, IPL and lasers enable dermatologists to wipe out 50 to 80 percent of hair in about six treatments, and they prevent most of it from returning with maintenance sessions.

**AT HOME:** The white coats are impressed by new home hair-removal systems for one key reason: They have been proven to work, according to research published in peer-reviewed medical journals. Two of the most promising devices are the Tria (a laser that costs \$995) and the Silk'n (a pulsed-light machine for \$800). The gun-shaped gadgets are designed to be used only on the body, take about two weeks to begin working (you zap your

skin in a gridlike pattern and wait for hair to fall out from the root), and can eliminate a significant amount of fuzz. (Tria has shown a 70 percent reduction in hair after two treatments; Silk'n gives a 45 to 75 percent reduction after three treatments.) "But it could take 30 to 60 minutes to do one leg, so you have to be motivated," says Ranella Hirsch, president of the American Society of Cosmetic Dermatology & Aesthetic Surgery. That's quite a bit of time, considering each zap can feel like a rubber band snapping against your skin—particularly with the Silk'n. Other downsides: The results are only temporary, requiring maintenance sessions every two to three weeks to prevent or slow hair regrowth. Finally, neither of these devices works on blonde hair (because there isn't enough pigment to absorb the follicle-killing light), and they can bleach skin or burn women with dark or tanned skin (a built-in sensor acts as a safety mechanism to prevent them from firing). Dermatologists are interested in testing the next big gadget: Gillette is rumored to be working with Palomar, a laser maker, to create a diode laser that targets even the deepest hair follicles.

The No!No! (\$250) works like a bug zapper, heating the follicles to cause each hair to fall out immediately after treatment. Unlike with waxing, even stubble can be removed, and unlike lasers and IPL, the No!No! works on all skin tones and colors. Regrowth is reduced if the device is used two to three times a week. In one study published in the *Journal of Drugs in Dermatology*, 12 subjects treated their legs twice a week for 6 weeks with the No!No! Three months after the final session, approximately 44 percent of the hair had not returned. (The results were less impressive near the bikini line and belly button, where only 15 percent of hair was cleared.) The No!No! will soon have an attachment to treat facial hair.

## ANTI-ACNE LIGHT THERAPY

A dermatologist's best weapon against acne used to be the pen with which she wrote an Accutane prescription, but now acne is also being blasted with high-tech machines that emit blue light, which penetrates pores and kills the bacteria

that cause blemishes. Dermatologists can reduce spots by 40 to 70 percent with eight sessions over four weeks (the total cost is around \$1,000). And one study in the *British Journal of Dermatology* showed that the results are even better when anti-inflammatory red light is added to the treatment.

**AT HOME:** The newest handheld zit zap-pers emit either light or a combination of light and heat to shrink pimples and prevent new ones from forming. Tända's Professional Skincare System (\$395) and the Omnilux Clear-U (\$299) most closely mimic in-office procedures, releasing blue wavelengths to clear acne gradually, over four to eight weeks, and red light to soothe inflamed skin. In a recent study published in the *Journal of Drugs in Dermatology*, 21 patients who had treated their mild to moderate acne with eight Omnilux Clear-U sessions (alternating between red and blue light) ended up with significantly clearer skin—even after they'd stopped using the device. Eight weeks after the final treatment, in fact, researchers counted an average of 69 percent fewer pimples. Each treatment takes 10 to 20 minutes.

When heat is added to the light, say the makers of No!No! Skin (\$250), zits can be reduced in just hours. "It's based on the concept that if you apply heat to a developing pimple, it will shrink the inflammation down pretty quickly," says David J. Goldberg, director of dermatology laser research at Mount Sinai School of Medicine. In scientific studies led by Neil Sadick, clinical professor of dermatology at Weill Medical College of Cornell University, "lesions went down in a day or two," he says, "like what you can do with a cortisone injection," one of the top treatments for eliminating blemishes quickly. Hirsch is more cautious, saying that experts disagree at this point on the benefits of home light and heat machines. At the very least, even skeptics believe, light gadgets may boost the effectiveness of acne creams and gels. The devices' small heads (about a centimeter in diameter) make them ideal for spot-treating pimples—but not for clearing up your entire face. For severe break-outs, Accutane and professional-grade laser and light treatments are still the most powerful options. ♦

## Gentler Deep-Wrinkle Treatment

It's not every day that top physicians throw around terms like "transformational" to describe new medical treatments. But that's exactly what they're saying about the fractional CO<sub>2</sub> resurfacing lasers now available for professional use. CO<sub>2</sub> lasers are unparalleled for improving sun-damaged skin because they remove the epidermis and cause significant changes in the dermis and dermal collagen, prompting the slow regrowth of firmer, healthier skin. But traditional CO<sub>2</sub> lasers fell out of favor over a decade ago because they could also cause bleached spots and scarring, and required a long and painful recovery. "You had to hibernate for weeks, and you looked like a tomato," says McDaniel. The new, fractional version "leaves little columns of normal skin," he says, allowing faster healing but similar improvements in texture, spotting, and sagging. Patients with deep wrinkles still experience up to seven days of crusting and severe redness, followed by another several

weeks of subtler, lingering side effects. "But there's enough natural tissue left that the chance of any complications, like bleaching, is limited," says Roy G. Geronemus, clinical professor of dermatology at New York University Medical Center. It's the first ablative laser that can be used safely on the neck and body; other aggressive lasers may cause scarring on the body, as the skin heals more slowly there than on the face. The fractional CO<sub>2</sub> laser is also being lauded as the best therapy to date to significantly fade pigmented scars, acne scars, and stretch marks (reddish ones respond best, but it also diminishes purple ones). Recent research from the journal *Lasers in Surgery and Medicine* showed that two to three treatments with a fractional CO<sub>2</sub> laser reduced the depth of acne scars—which are notoriously difficult to treat—by 43 to 80 percent. "It's absolutely revolutionized the way that we approach scars," says Geronemus, a coauthor of the study.

## Laser Lipo

**T**he term "laser lipo" sounds like something straight out of *Star Wars*, with Dr. Luke Skywalker using his light saber to save the universe from flab.

Currently, laser liposuction (such as SmartLipo) involves inserting a laser through a small incision, moving it under the skin to melt the fat, and then extracting the laser and replacing it with a suction tube. Proponents of the technique say it leads to less postoperative pain and bruising, and can even tighten the skin. However, many top doctors are highly critical: The procedure can only remove small pockets of fat, may require 60 to 90 minutes additional operating time, costs more than traditional liposuction, and can even cause burns. "When you expose the undersurface of the skin to this kind of heat, you can get tightening, but you can also get permanent skin injury," says Jeffrey Kenkel, associate professor of plastic surgery and vice chairman of plastic surgery at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas. A new variation of laser liposuction, LipoEze, claims to be faster, cheaper, and significantly less risky than earlier lasers. According to Rhoda S. Narins, a New York City dermatologist who has published several studies on laser liposuction, the device eliminates the risk of burning because the laser is encased in a liposuction cannula. This combination fat-melting/fat-removing tube enables the surgeon to take out as much fat as traditional liposuction would, says Brian Zelickson, an adjunct associate professor of dermatology at the University of Minnesota who led the initial study of LipoEze (note: He is an investor in the company and holds shares of its stock). Also, in pilot studies, LipoEze seems to allow doctors to remove fat twice as fast as traditional liposuction, something that may translate into lower prices for patients. But until all clinical trials are complete (which is expected to be in mid-2009), many plastic surgeons and dermatologists are reserving judgment. —JOAN KRON