

Post Op Instructions for Laser Resurfacing

Joe Niamtu, III DMD

Laser resurfacing is still considered the gold standard for skin rejuvenation including skin tightening, wrinkle improvement, improving age spots and acne scars. Although this produces a dramatic result, it is by the same token a demanding recovery. The recovery process is simple, but many patients are confused on exactly what to do. It is important to keep in mind that the care of your lasered face has an effect on your final result, so the better you do, the better you look.

The laser produces a second degree burn and removes the outer layer of your skin. In order to heal properly, the patient must follow some basic daily steps of skin care. It is important that you follow these directions exactly and not substitute your own products, devices or care regimen. We have performed over 1,000 laser procedures and we know what works and what does not. If you want to deviate from our post laser regimen, please call the office to discuss the requested change.

Pre Laser Skin Conditioning and Considerations

Using bleaching cream and Retin-A for at least several weeks before your surgery can increase healing and speed recovery. While it is not an absolute necessity it can help. In addition, starting these products after laser treatment will help maintain the result. These products can be purchased from our office in the form of separate products or in a comprehensive skin care kit.

It is also important to discuss your upcoming laser procedure with one of our staff that can prepare you for the recovery and how and when to use make up effectively. This should be done at your pre op appointment, several weeks before surgery. It is also important to warn your caregiver or ride home that your face will look swollen and covered with ointment when you leave the office.

Be Prepared

Patients that do the best are those that are prepared for their procedure. You will need washcloths for compresses, white vinegar, ice or cold water, an old pillow case as not to stain your good linen. You will need a post laser ointment, cleanser, moisturizer and sunscreen, gauze. You should read the directions in advance and use a magic marker to mark each tube so you are clear what to use and when. We recommend the Vanicream brand of products which are available from our office or Wallgreens.

Laser Medicines

Having laser surgery requires numerous medicines to prevent infection, ease discomfort, and reduce swelling. Lasering small areas of skin such as the lower eyelids or a simple scar does not require many of the standard medications.

You will need to get the following prescriptions filled and understand when to take them.

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Laser Medicines continued

- a. *Antiviral Medicine*- lasering the skin can cause viral infections especially in patients with a history of herpes or cold sores. This medicine is called Valtrex or Valacyclovir. Follow the directions on the bottle. Note that this medicine is started 2 days before your surgery.
- b. *Antibiotic Medicine*- this is to prevent bacterial infection and is usually Keflex or Cephalosporin. You will begin taking this the day of your surgery after you get home and the dose is one pill every 6 hours until the prescription is gone.
- c. *Pain medicine*- this is usually a hydrocodone or oxycodone prescription and is only needed if discomfort is significant. Take as directed on the bottle.
- d. *Sleep aid*- not all patients need this, but valium or a similar drug may be prescribed to relax you and allow sound sleep.
- e. *Anti-swelling medicine*- not all patients will receive this medicine and it depends on the actual procedure(s) you have undergone. If you do receive a prescription for prednisone, it is started the day after surgery. You will take 3 tablets at the same time once a day with some food in your stomach. This prescription will last 5 days.

Medication	Usage	Necessary	Dose	Stop When
Valtrex	Anti-herpes	Yes	1 tab twice per day	Pills are gone
Keflex	Antibiotic	Yes	1 tab every 6 hours	Pills are gone
Prednisone	Anti-swelling	If Needed	3 tabs every morning for 5 days	Pills are gone
Percocet	Discomfort	If Needed	1 tab every 4-6 hours, if needed	Discomfort stops
Diazepam	Sleep Aid	If Needed	1 tab 1.5 hours before bed, if needed	Normal sleep resumes

WEEK ONE

Cold Compresses

Laser recovery is usually a 2 week recovery (with the exception of light laser) and the first week is the most demanding period. Your face will be swollen and covered with ointment. Your body will produce a yellowish exudate that is part of "Nature's Band-Aid". Do not be alarmed at this buildup of yellowish residue (especially under the eyes) and DO NOT try to scrub it off. It will resolve naturally over the next week.

When you get home from the office, placing cold compresses (gauze or wash clothes soaked in cold water) on your face will cool the heat and help reduce swelling. Although this is not a necessity, most patients feel better with the cold compresses. Using a clean salad bowl filled with ice water and several wash cloths is a good way to manage this. As one compress loses its chill, another can be removed from the bowl and placed on the skin. This can be done for the first several days.

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POST LASER QUICK START GUIDE



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1. Vaniply Ointment – begin immediately and use 24/7 for first 9-10 days
2. Vanicream Cleanser (bar or liquid) – begin washing face twice per day on day 2
3. Vanicream Moisturizing Skin Cream – begin using instead the Vaniply Ointment (#1) on day 8-10
4. Vanicream Sunscreen – begin using twice per day on day 12-14

COVER

A greasy covering that is applied topically. It is all that you need to put on your face for the first week.

- Vaniply (from our office or Walgreens)
- Aquaphor (purchased from the drugstore)
- Non-medicated Vaseline

DO NOT PUT ANYTHING ELSE ON YOUR FACE. DO NOT USE NEOSPORIN.

As much as we warn patients, someone always wants to try some potion or lotion which can cause problems and delay healing; this includes aloe, vitamin E, herbal potions and lotions, etc.

The lasered areas must be covered with the “grease” (Vaniply) on a 24-hour basis. You do not need excessive ointment (don’t want to drip and irritate eyes), only enough to provide a light greasy covering of the skin. The cold compresses will wash off the healing ointment, so it needs to be reapplied continuously. Dry skin will delay your healing and it is important to continually reapply the ointment every several hours. Always wash your hands before touching your face as the open skin is more susceptible to infection.

WASH

You will need to wash your face twice a day beginning the day after surgery with a recommended cleanser.

Approved Cleansers

- Vanicream Cleanser or Cleansing Bar (from our office or Walgreens)
- Cetaphil Gentle Cleanser (from drug store)
- Baby Shampoo
- Cleanser purchased from our office

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WASH continued

Your skin will be sore, so only use your fingertips and **NOT** a washcloth or mechanical device. Men should not shave for 10 days. Most patients find it convenient to wash their face in the shower where they can let the shower water soak and soften the residue on their face and then gently wash with the cleanser.

Again, the goal is not to wash all the residue off of your face but rather to lightly cleanse it. Carefully blot dry with a clean towel and reapply the healing ointment. Do not apply excessive ointment to your forehead and upper lids as it will drip and irritate the eyes. This will not hurt your eyes, but it can sting or irritate them.

SOAK

Many patients find that white vinegar soaks are very cleansing and soothing. This is made by mixing 1 teaspoon of white vinegar mixed with 1 cup of tap water. Do not use more vinegar, as the level of acidity is important. The diluted white vinegar is actually anesthetic, but if it burns, you can use less than a teaspoon. The white vinegar mixture is applied to the face by soaking for 10-15 minutes with gauze soaked in the solution. These soaks help with the pain, dissolve some of the residue and are also antimicrobial which decreases infections and can be done every several hours. The soaks can be done at any time, but may be more effective after your shower or face wash and before reapplying the healing ointment.

COVER AGAIN

After you wash, reapply "grease" (Vaniply). The regimen detailed above is basically all the care that needs to be done until the new skin grows back. This generally happens between days 9-12. When the new outer layer of the skin (epidermis) grows back, the face is no longer raw, but rather the healing skin is smooth and pink. This healing process does not happen all at once. Some areas of your face will heal faster, while other areas (eyelids especially) take longer. By the beginning of the second post laser week, any raw areas should still be covered with ointment but any smooth and pink areas can be treated with the moisturizer only.

WEEK TWO

MOISTURIZE

When the entire face is smooth and pink, no greasy ointment is needed and continual use will clog your pores. The average time that most patients switch from the "grease" to the moisturizer is about 9-10 days. Throughout this entire healing process, you should only use our recommended products and never anything with preservatives, fragrances, stabilizers, alcohol or other ingredients. Dry skin will delay your healing and it is important to continually reapply the moisturizer at least every 2 hours as it really soaks up into the skin.

Approved Moisturizers

- Vanicream
- Cetaphil Gentle Moisturizer (purchased from drugstore)
- Other moisturizer purchased from our office

PROTECT

When you begin leaving your house, you will need sunscreen to protect your skin. Not any sunscreen will suffice as many products have irritants that will delay your healing. We prefer the product as it has no irritants and also contains zinc oxide which promotes healing.

Approved Sunscreens

- Vanicream Sensitive Skin SunScreen (from our office or Walgreens) twice per day.
- SkinMedica Environmental Defense SPF 30

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Overview	
Day 1	Cold packs and "grease" (Vaniply, Aquaphor or unmedicated Vaseline.)
Day 2	Wash face tice per day with Vanicream Cleanser and/or white vinegar soaks. Keep face covered with "grease."
Day 7	First office follow-up visit with skin care staff.
Day 7-9	Begin Vaniply moisturizer instead of "grease." Use moisturizer only on non-oozing areas.
Day 14	Second office with doctor and staff.
Day 9-14	Continue washing face, using moisturizer and use sunscreen.

FOLLOW UP

You will generally have a post laser follow up appointment between week one and two. Please bring all of your creams and ointments so our staff can make sure you are using the correct products and evaluate your healing. If you are ever in doubt about your healing or instructions, visit our webpage www.lovethatface.com and view the directions and instructional videos online, or call our office.

The primary goal is to get through the first 2 weeks of laser treatment and ease back into your normal skin care regimen. We recommend all patients using prescription strength skin care to maintain their youthful results. Retin-A, bleaching cream, and sunscreen should be started as soon as the skin will tolerate it.

COMMON POST LASER CONDITIONS

Your laser treatment is somewhat of a hobby for the first 4-6 weeks as you need to take care gentle care of your brand new "baby skin". During healing you skin will undergo numerous changes. Some patients will experience a secondary peel where their skin gets flakey. This is frequently a sign that the skin is under moisturized. Remember, you have to apply your ointments or creams every several hours.

After your two week healing period, your skin regimen will become less intense - washing, applying moisturizer and sunscreen is all that is necessary.

Post-Laser Pinkness (erythema)

Post-laser skin pinkness is the most common complaint of post laser patients. Pinkness is a normal healing process and is a sign of newly formed skin. Pinkness is extremely variable and can last several weeks in some patients and several months in other patients. A general rule is that the longer the pinkness, the better the result, as more collagen is being formed. When pinkness is extreme or longer lasting than expected it can be a sign of over aggressive scrubbing or rubbing, or a sign of some irritating substance being applied. As stated numerous times, this is baby sensitive skin and patients have to be careful of what they apply. We have seen extreme irritation from aloe, baby oil, make up, and numerous topical products that patients applied. If you think your pinkness is getting worse, please come into the office so we can evaluate your condition. We may recommend an over the counter hydrocortisone cream or other therapies for a short while to reduce inflammation. Again, pinkness is normal and patients can cover this with makeup. Sometime specialized makeup preparations are required and our staff can instruct you on this.

Skin Infection

Post laser infections are rare, but bacterial, viral and yeast infections can occur. It is important to wash your hands frequently and not touch your face after touching other body parts. After several days, pain of the treatment should improve. Increasing pain, severe itching, new pimples, ulcers or lesions may signify infection and if you are concerned, call our office for evaluation.

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COMMON POST LASER CONDITIONS continued

Post-Laser Hyperpigmentation

Our skin has pigment cells called melanocytes. Blondes and redheads have much less melanin and the darker your skin type the more melanin that is present. When the skin is irritated, the melanocytes are stimulated to produce increased melanin and this causes a blotchy tan across the lasered skin. On some patients, it is mild, and on others it can be severe. THIS IS NOT A PERMANENT CONDITION AND CAN BE CLEARED UP IN SEVERAL WEEKS.

The use of bleaching cream, Retin-A and sunscreen will make a dramatic difference in clearing the hyperpigmentation. As hyperpigmentation is caused by light and inflammation, it is important to use sunscreen, even indoors. Overhead lighting in your office can increase pigmentation, as can driving. ***Use sunscreen twice a day!*** Finally any irritation to the new “baby” skin can accelerate hyperpigmentation. This can include wind, car defrost and hair dryers blowing on the face. Be gentle to your face! Post laser hyperpigmentation usually presents between 20 and 30 days after laser. Don't be alarmed, 40% of patients can experience this and it will resolve.

Acne Breakout

Although uncommon, some patients may experience some minor acne after laser. This will usually resolve without treatment or may require antibiotics.

Milia

Milia are small white bumps that are clogged pores. They can form as single bumps or in clusters. They usually resolve by themselves and if persist are easily removed.

Shiny Skin

Newly formed, well moisturized skin may at first be shiny or have a different texture. The thin skin under the eyes may feel bumpy. All of these changes will normalize with time.

Scarring

Scars are rare with laser treatment but some isolated areas of skin thickening can occur. This is treated with anti-inflammatory medications and responds well. Permanent scarring is extremely rare.