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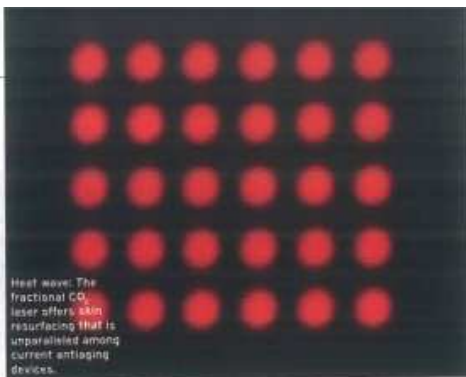
FRACTIONAL CO<sub>2</sub> LASER



ask a group of dermatologists to name the best anti-aging up-and-comers and the ensuing debate could get heated—unless they're discussing the fractional carbon dioxide laser. This newly launched device emits a tic-tac-toe grid of infrared light, creating millions of microscopic wounds that kick the skin into repair mode and jump-start collagen production. Though it's being used by only a handful of physicians, fractional CO<sub>2</sub> is already getting rave reviews for its ability to firm skin and reduce fine lines, wrinkles, and pigmentation.

While the fractional delivery system is novel, the carbon dioxide laser isn't exactly a new kid on the block. "The results of the traditional carbon dioxide laser were terrific, but it was plagued with a prolonged recovery time," says New York City dermatologist Dennis Gross, MD. Popular in the '90s, CO<sub>2</sub> lasers literally burned away the skin's surface to produce dramatic tightening and improved texture, with one major downfall: post-op house arrest (think open wounds) for three weeks, if not more. "It's like taking a blowtorch to the skin," says Kenneth Mark, MD, an assistant clinical professor of dermatology at NYU Langone Medical Center in NYC. But for those willing to put in the time, the benefits of the CO<sub>2</sub> laser outperformed everything else—easily taking 10 years off a patient's face.

Gross calls fractional CO<sub>2</sub> "the wave of the future" because it only hits up to 50 percent of the skin's surface with thermal blasts, cutting recovery time by 80 percent, but still produces most of the benefits of its predecessor. "Fractions of the epidermis remain intact, while heat spreads significantly deeper in the dermis than with the original CO<sub>2</sub>," says Manhattan dermatologist Roy Geronemus, MD, who has treated more than a thousand patients with the recently FDA-cleared Fraxel Re:pair, one version of fractional CO<sub>2</sub>. Afterward, treated areas are left with what one ELLE editor (who was zapped by Gross with the Mixto CO<sub>2</sub>) called "a



Heat wave: The fractional CO<sub>2</sub> laser offers skin resurfacing that is unparalleled among current anti-aging devices.

bad sunburn" that lasts around three days before peeling (expect a week or so for full recovery; some may experience slight redness for up to a month). The price tag is hefty, averaging \$4,000 for a single session, and one to three may be necessary depending on the severity of pigmentation or wrinkles and the strength of the laser, which can be adjusted by the doctor. According to a study (which is currently awaiting publication) conducted by Geronemus, nine out of 10 patients who received fractional CO<sub>2</sub> on the face showed a 50 to an amazing 100 percent improvement in skin laxity and pigmentation within three months of treatment.

Like any resurfacing procedure, fractional CO<sub>2</sub> comes with minor risks: acne, cold sores, or hypopigmentation. "The laser breaks the epidermal barrier," Mark says. "This leads to a chance of infection." According to Mark, most of these hazards can be avoided with pretreatment care, including antibiotic and antiviral prescriptions. Macrene Alexiades-Armenakas, MD, PhD, an assistant clinical professor at Yale University School of Medicine, who is conducting a study on SmartXide DGT (a type of fractional CO<sub>2</sub> device), has treated one patient for small white patches that developed after another physician administered fractional CO<sub>2</sub>, a side effect that she notes could possibly occur in all skin tones. Although she's seen moderate results from non-ablative (no-downtime) devices such as Titan, she still votes for fractional CO<sub>2</sub>: "I've been waiting for this breakthrough for over 15 years," Alexiades says. —NICOLE CAYANES

Top right: Photo Resurfacing, all skin (Photo: Steven Krause)

ELLE TOP 5

You voted these SPF-loaded moisturizers as your everyday essentials



**EXTREME MEASURES**  
Clinique Superdefense Triple Action Moisturizer SPF 25 "makes skin soft and silky" and acts as a "shield against sun and pollution" to help prevent brown spots and fine lines.



**IN THE CLEAR**  
You "tried all the others" and fell in love with "skintone fixer" Olay Definity Correcting Protective Lotion with SPF 15.

**HIGHER POWER**  
Neutrogena Healthy Defense Daily Moisturizer SPF 45 "has it all," including "a high level of sun protection" and antioxidants in a lightweight cream formula that truly "fits the bill."



**FORCE OF NATURE**  
"One hundred percent organic," Juice Beauty SPF 30 Mineral Sheer Moisturizer is "a natural sunscreen" that "works great under makeup" and contains ultrahydrating glycerin.



**SHEER LOCK**  
You wear the "smooth, nongreasy" La Mer The SPF 18 Fluid because "the elegant texture doesn't feel like sunscreen."

Log on to [ELLE.com/Top5](http://ELLE.com/Top5) to vote for your beauty favorites and view past poll results.