

GENERAL INFORMATION

Lasers have been used by plastic surgeons as a surgical instrument for many years. Laser energy can be used to cut, vaporize, or selectively remove skin and deeper tissues. There are many different methods for the surgical use of lasers. Conditions such as wrinkles, sun damaged skin, scars and some types of skin lesions/disorders may be treated with a laser. In some situations, laser treatments may be performed at the same time as other surgical procedures.

Skin treatment programs may be used both before and after laser skin treatments in order to enhance the results.

ALTERNATIVE TREATMENTS

Alternative forms of treatment include not undergoing the proposed laser skin resurfacing procedure. Other forms of skin treatment (chemical peel) or surgical procedures (dermabrasion or excisional surgery) may be substituted. In certain situations, the laser may offer a specific therapeutic advantage over other forms of treatment. Alternatively, laser resurfacing procedures in some situations may not represent a better alternative to other forms of surgery or skin treatment when indicated. Risks and potential complications are associated with alternative forms of treatment that involve skin resurfacing or surgical procedures.

SPECIFIC RISKS OF LASER RESURFACING PROCEDURES OF SKIN

Infection:

Although infection following laser skin resurfacing is unusual, bacterial, fungal, and viral infections can occur. **Herpes simplex virus** skin infections can occur following a laser treatment. This applies to both individuals with a history of Herpes simplex virus infections (typically presenting as “cold sores”) and individuals with no known history of Herpes simplex virus infections in the mouth area. Specific medications must be prescribed and taken both prior to and following the laser treatment procedure in order to suppress infection from this virus. Should an infection occur, additional treatment including antibiotics, hospitalization, or additional surgery may be necessary.

Burns:

Laser energy can produce burns that can lead to scarring. Adjacent structures, including the eyes, may be injured or permanently damaged by the laser beam. Burns are rare, yet represent the effect of heat produced within the tissues by laser energy. Additional treatment may be necessary to treat laser burns.

Color Change:

Laser resurfacing may potentially change the natural color of your skin. Skin redness usually lasts several days to weeks depending on the treatment and your skin type, but may occasionally persist for 6 months or longer following laser skin resurfacing. Be sure to discuss the likely duration of redness with your plastic surgeon. There is a possibility of irregular color variations within the skin including areas that are both lighter and darker. A line of demarcation between normal skin and skin treated with lasers can occur.

Accutane® (Isotretinoin):

Accutane® is a prescription medication used to treat certain skin diseases. If you have ever taken Accutane®, you should discuss this with your surgeon. This drug may impair the ability of skin to heal following treatments or surgery for a variable amount of time even after the patient has ceased taking it. Individuals who have taken this drug are advised to allow their skin adequate time to recover from Accutane before undergoing skin treatment procedures.

Skin Tissue Pathology:

Laser energy directed at skin lesions may potentially vaporize the lesion. Laboratory examination of the tissue specimen may not be possible.

Visible Skin Patterns:

Laser resurfacing procedures may produce visible patterns within the skin. The occurrence of this is not predictable.

Distortion of Anatomic Features:

Laser skin resurfacing can produce distortion of the appearance of the eyelids, mouth, and other visible anatomic landmarks. The occurrence of this is not predictable. Should this occur, additional treatment including surgery may be necessary.

Damaged Skin:

Skin that has been previously treated with chemical peels or dermabrasion, or damaged by burns, electrolysis (hair removal treatments), or radiation therapy may heal abnormally or slowly following treatment by lasers or other surgical techniques. The occurrence of this is not predictable. Additional treatment may be necessary. If you have ever had such treatment, you should inform your surgeon.

Infection:

Infection, although uncommon, can occur after surgery. Should an infection occur, additional treatment including antibiotics, hospitalization, or additional surgery may be necessary. It is important to tell your surgeon of any other infections, such as ingrown toenails, insect bites, tooth abscesses, or urinary tract infections that you may have. Infections in other parts of the body, may lead to an infection in the operated area.

Scarring:

All surgery leaves scars, some more visible than others. Although good wound healing after a surgical procedure is expected, abnormal scars may occur within the skin and deeper tissues. Scars may be unattractive and of a different color than the surrounding skin tone. Scar appearance may also vary within the same scar. Scars may be asymmetrical (appear different on the right and left side of the body). There is a possibility of visible marks in the skin from sutures. In some cases, scars may require surgical revision or treatment.

Skin Contour Irregularities:

Contour and shape irregularities may occur. Visible and palpable wrinkling of skin may occur. Residual skin irregularities at the ends of the incisions or “dog ears” are always a possibility when there is excessive redundant skin. This may improve with time, or it can be surgically corrected.

Skin Discoloration/Swelling:

Some bruising and swelling will normally occur. The skin in or near the surgical site can appear either lighter or darker than surrounding skin. Although uncommon, swelling and skin discoloration may persist for long periods of time and, in rare situations, may be permanent.

Skin Sensitivity:

Itching, tenderness, or exaggerated responses to hot or cold temperatures may occur after surgery. Usually this resolves during healing, but in rare situations, it may be chronic.

Pain:

You will experience pain after your procedure. Pain of varying intensity and duration may occur and persist after procedure. Chronic pain may occur very infrequently.

Allergic Reactions:

In rare cases, local allergies to tape, topical preparations or injected agents have been reported. Serious systemic reactions including shock (anaphylaxis) may occur in response to drugs used during surgery and prescription medicines. Allergic reactions may require additional treatment. It is important to notify your physician of any previous allergic reactions.

Asymmetry:

Symmetrical body appearance may not result after surgery. Factors such as skin tone, fatty deposits, skeletal prominence, and muscle tone may contribute to normal asymmetry in body features. Most patients have differences between the right and left side of their bodies before any surgery is performed. Additional surgery may be necessary to attempt to diminish asymmetry.

Unsatisfactory Result:

Although good results are expected, there is no guarantee or warranty expressed or implied, regarding the results that may be obtained. The body is not symmetrical and almost everyone has some degree of unevenness, which may not be recognized in advance. One side of the face may be slightly larger, one side of the face droopier. The more realistic your expectations are, the better your results will appear to you. Some patients never achieve their desired goals or results, at no fault of the surgeon or procedure. You may be disappointed with the results of the treatment. Unsatisfactory results may NOT improve with each additional treatment.