

LASER TREATMENT FOR ACNE

Dr. David Goldberg Performs the Most Effective, Non-Invasive Procedure for Eradicating Acne

Q: Dr. Goldberg, I am in my early 20's and have been suffering from acute acne for several years now. I've heard about many types of oral and topical medications, but I don't know what method will be best for permanently eradicating acne.

A: Over the years a variety of different techniques have been used for improving acne. These include topical therapies as well as medications taken by mouth. No known methods lead to permanent cures in acne in all patients. In most cases inflammatory acne, or acne that tends to lead to scarring, has been treated with Accutane or long term oral antibiotics. Unfortunately both of these approaches have been associated with significant potentially permanent side effects. The use of lasers and laser-like devices has been shown to improve inflammatory acne without all the potential systemic side effects seen with Accutane and/or antibiotic use.

Q: How does the laser treatment work?

A: Laser and laser like technology target 2 important causes of acne. Some treatments target the bacteria that grow in acne lesions; other treatments promote shrinkage of the overly enlarged sebaceous glands seen in acne. Ideally we combine both treatments when treating inflammatory acne.

Q: Is the process painful? What if I already have severe scarring from acne?

A: When attempting to decrease the bacteria in acne, a variety of LED (light emitting diode), intense pulsed light and lasers have been shown to be highly effective. A series of treatments is required; many of the treatments are painless or near painless. In general, lasers are used to shrink the sebaceous glands. These lasers are the same systems that have been shown to improve acne scarring. Very resistant acne may be further treated by combining a light based device with a topical agent known as ALA. This particular treatment approach has been termed photodynamic therapy. Finally, microdermabrasion tends to open and clean out some of the earliest lesions that are the precursors to inflammatory acne.

Q: Is laser treatment the most effective for seeing results?

A: Based on studies performed at Skin Laser & Surgery Specialists of New York and New Jersey and recently published in peer-review journals, we know that treatment with some of the aforementioned lasers leads to not only improvement in acne and acne scars, but gives skin an overall healthier appearance. It is for this reason that these techniques have become the very popular, high tech, non-invasive approach sought by so many patients.

Q: What are the different types of acne?

A: There are many variations of acne/pimples/zits, ranging in severity from mild to severely disfiguring. Acne Vulgaris is the most common form of acne which includes several types of pimples. These acne lesions include blackheads, whiteheads, papules, pustules, nodules and cysts.

Mild to Moderate acne vulgaris consists of the following types of acne spots:

Whiteheads: Whiteheads result when a pore is completely blocked, trapping sebum (oil), bacteria, and dead skin cells, causing a white appearance on the surface. These types of acne lesions sometimes seem to be begging to be popped. Make sure you read about how to pop a pimple before you attempt this. Whiteheads are normally quicker in life cycle than blackheads.

Blackheads: Blackheads result when a pore is only partially blocked, allowing some of the trapped sebum (oil), bacteria, and dead skin cells to slowly drain to the surface. The black color is not caused by dirt. Rather, it is a reaction of the skin's own pigment, melanin, reacting with the oxygen in the air. A blackhead tends to be a stable structure, and can often take a long time to clear.

Papules: Papules are small, red, tender bumps with no head. Do not squeeze a papule. It will do no good, and may exacerbate scarring.

Pustules: A pustule is similar to a whitehead, but is inflamed, and appears as a red circle with a white or yellow center.

Severe acne vulgaris is characterized by nodules and cysts:

Nodules: As opposed to the lesions mentioned above, nodular acne consists of acne spots which are much larger, can be quite painful, and can sometimes last for months. Nodules are large, hard bumps under the skin's surface. Scarring is common. Absolutely do not attempt to squeeze such a lesion. You may cause severe trauma to the skin and the lesion may last for months longer than it normally would. Dermatologists often have ways of lessening swelling and preventing scarring.

Cysts: An acne cyst can appear similar to a nodule, but is pus-filled, and can be described as having a diameter of 5mm or more across. They can be painful. Again, scarring is common with cystic acne. Squeezing an acne cyst may cause a deeper infection and more painful inflammation which will last much longer than if you had left it alone. Dermatologists often have ways of lessening swelling and preventing scarring.

Acne Rosacea can look similar to the aforementioned acne vulgaris, and the two types of acne are sometimes confused for one another. Rosacea affects millions of people, most of whom are over the age of 30. It appears as a red rash which is normally confined to the cheeks, nose, forehead and chin. The redness is often accompanied by bumps, pimples, and skin blemishes. Blood vessels may also become more visible on the skin. Blackheads are not a part of rosacea. It is more prevalent in women, but often more severe when found in men. Left untreated, it can cause swelling of the nose and the growth of excess tissue, a condition called rhinophyma. Treatment is often different for rosacea than for acne, and it is important that you consult a doctor can determine if what you are experiencing is acne vulgaris or rosacea.

Severe forms of acne are rare, but they are a great hardship to the people who experience them, and can be disfiguring--and, like all forms of acne, can have psychological effects on the sufferer.

David J. Goldberg, M.D. (<http://www.skinandlasers.com>) is on faculty and Director of both MOHS Surgery, and Laser Research, Mt. Sinai Medical Center in New York; and Director of Skin Laser & Surgery Specialists of New York & New Jersey. He is past President of the American Society for Laser Medicine & Surgery. Dr. Goldberg was voted "one of the top ten laser surgeons in the U.S." by Self Magazine and "one of the best doctors in America" by Woodward/White, Inc. He was recently named Editor in Chief of the first web-based cosmetic laser e-journal located at <http://www.lasernews.net>.

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* Dr. Goldberg on the Road:

4/1/2005 - 4/3/2005 American Society for Lasers in Medicine and Surgery - Annual Meeting, Lake Buena Vista, FL

4/19/2005 Spa Expo - New York City, NY

"Non-invasive Anti-aging Skin Treatments: Past, Present and Future"

5/12/2005 - 5/15/2005 Cosmetic Dermatology Seminar - Anaheim, CA

5/20/2005 Atlantic Dermatology Meeting, NY, NY

Non-ablative Treatments

5/29/2005 IMCAS Botulinum Toxin and Filler Meeting, Paris, France

New Wrinkle Fillers and Botulinum Toxins in the US

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