

Reversing photo-aging

By Kenneth D. Osorio, M.D.

It begins innocently enough. First, the brown blotches become more difficult to conceal or broken capillaries on the face start becoming more obvious. As many Arizona residents know, photo-aging is a common and unwelcome part of living in the sunny Southwest. Years of sun exposure, even when most of it was during childhood, can leave their mark as unsightly irregular brown discolorations, broken facial capillaries, freckles and fine wrinkles. Until recently, invasive and costly laser skin resurfacing was one of the few options available, and even then, after a week of healing, the broken capillaries would often persist. However, now with pulsed light therapy, popularly known as the "fotofacial," all of the elements of photodamage are addressed with an added plus – no downtime at all.

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What is sun damage? The most common form is one we rarely consider – freckles. Although a smattering of freckles across a child's nose may look cute, these brown spots, medically known as solar lentigenes, are actually a sign of sun damage. As we age, the freckles become larger, darker and start to take over more territory on the face, chest and arms, at which point they just aren't cute anymore. In fact, when the sun has done enough damage, these dark discolorations are derisively referred to as "age spots."

Efforts to diminish the appearance of irregular discoloration go back centuries. Ancient Egyptians used "oil of fenugreek" in an attempt to fade freckles and age spots. More recently, lemon juice has been tried as a home remedy. All of this has given way to modern

cosmetics. None, however, have been very effective. Here is where light-based treatments have been truly revolutionary, easily making freckles and brown spots a distant memory.

How is light therapy superior to laser treatments? First, pulsed light treatments use multiple wavelengths of light, as opposed to lasers which produce just one wavelength. These multiple waves of light focus their energy at different levels, allowing many different problems to be addressed at once. For instance, not only is irregular pigmentation smoothed, broken capillaries and redness cleared, but even unwanted facial hair is reduced. No single laser can improve such a diverse array of facial imperfections.

But light-based therapy has still further positive effects. Because the light energy heats the collagen-producing cells in the dermis, cells in this layer are stimulated to lay down new collagen – as much as 20 percent more. This new collagen formation plumps the skin, giving a more youthful appearance. Intense pulsed light, furthermore, has the wonderful effect of tightening up unsightly pores, perhaps permanently.

Best of all, unlike laser resurfacing, there is no disruption of one's lifestyle. Most patients simply cannot tolerate the extensive facial peeling associated with laser resurfacing, which can send patients into hiding for about a week. Intense pulsed light treatments are much different. After a treatment, patients experience mild facial flushing, which goes away in a few hours and can be easily concealed with makeup. Many have their fotofacial done during their lunch hour and go right back to work.

If you are considering reversing the photo-aging effects of the sun, feel free to call our office for this month's fotofacial special. We offer the most advanced fotofacial available, the Lumenis One Fotofacial. The Lumenis One is a fourth-generation IPL unit, backed by hundreds of clinical studies.

Although intense pulsed light is not a cure-all (for example, it has little effect on deep wrinkles of the face), it is a welcome therapy for those patients who would like to keep the aging effects of the Arizona sun at bay.

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