What is a fractional laser skin treatment?

Fractional laser skin treatment is a facial rejuvenation procedure aimed at reducing signs of aging such as wrinkles, skin laxity, and uneven skin pigment. Older laser technologies treated the entire surface of the skin to remove the superficial layer of the skin. The underlying skin cells would then have to regrow to cover the whole surface. Collagen under the surface is stimulated and re-organized as part of the healing process and this results in skin tightening and improvement in the appearance of wrinkles. This technique worked well but was associated with longer healing times and higher risk of complications. With fractional laser treatment, the laser beam is fractionated, or broken into a pattern of tiny spots. Only the spots are treated with the laser so that the adjacent skin cells on the surface are untouched. Those untreated skin cells on the surface can regrow to cover the treated areas and this results in faster healing times. However, the collagen underneath the surface is still stimulated, which results in the desired skin tightening and improvement in lines and wrinkles. This procedure is also useful for treating acne scarring.

Who is a good candidate for fractional laser skin treatment?

Patients in their 40s or beyond with moderate or severe facial lines or wrinkles are good candidates. Skin pigment irregularities and acne scarring can also be approved. This type of laser skin treatment is not appropriate for darker skinned people because of the risk of skin pigment changes.

Is fractional laser resurfacing performed by itself or with other procedures?

The procedure can be performed by itself or with other facial procedures such as injectable treatments, eyelid lift, or facelift.

What type of anesthesia is used fractional laser resurfacing?

The procedure is performed with topical anesthesia in the office.

What are the risks of fractional laser resurfacing?

Complications are uncommon but include infection, scarring, pigmentedary changes, and failure to achieve adequate improvement.

Can fractional laser resurfacing be repeated?

Yes, the procedure can be repeated in 3-6 months to achieve more improvement if necessary.
What is the expected recovery time after fractional laser resurfacing?

Patients are advised to take 4-5 days off work after the treatment. There will be some swelling and redness for the first few weeks that is most prominent during the first 4-5 days.

What do I need to do to schedule fractional laser resurfacing?

All patients must be examined and interviewed personally by Dr. Thomason. He will review your medical history and perform a thorough examination to determine if you are a good candidate for the procedure.

What do I need to do to prepare for the procedure once it is scheduled?

Dr. Thomason will inform you if you can take all of your regular medications before the procedure. On the day of the procedure, you should wear comfortable clothing and eat a light meal. You will be given a prescription pain medication prior to the procedure as well as topical anesthetic. Do not wear makeup on the day of the procedure. You will also be prescribed anti-viral medication starting 5 days before the procedure and continuing 5 days after the procedure. Most patients will also start a skin care regimen with prescription topical medication starting 2 weeks before the procedure.

What do I need to do after the procedure?

You will need to wash your face twice a day with a 1:1 mixture of white vinegar and distilled water for the first 5 days. This is the time period when the skin cells are covering the surface. You will also need to use petroleum jelly ointment to keep the skin extra moist during these first five days to help facilitate healing. You will continue a prescription skin regimen for two weeks after the procedure. Sunscreen must be continued for at least 3 months to prevent pigment changes in the skin.

When can I return to work?

Most patients are ready to return to work in 4-5 days, although there will still be some redness and mild swelling for several more weeks.

When should I call my doctor after the procedure?

Mild to moderate pain with swelling is normal after the procedure. A sudden increase in pain or redness may indicate infection and you should notify Dr. Thomason immediately. You will have regular follow-up visits to be sure that your skin is healing appropriately.

Timothy Thomason, M.D.
Board-certified by the American Board of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery
Board-certified by the American Board of Otolaryngology–Head & Neck Surgery