

The Chemical "A-PEEL"

by Karen Simpson

Help Reverse the Damage Created by the Sun

A chemical peel is a cosmetic procedure commonly used to reduce the appearance of blemishes and other skin irregularities. The peel is probably one of the most versatile cosmetic treatments on the market. Performed by trained individuals, the chemical peel effectively treats acne, different levels of scarring, pigmentation, freckles (those special "sun kisses" we received as children playing in the sun), liver spots, and wrinkles. They help reverse the damage created by the sun.

Chemical peels work by removing the superficial layers of the skin, resulting in a new growth of the skin layer(s). There are three types of peels available – the alpha hydroxy (AHA) peel, the trichloroacetic acid (TCA) peel, and the Phenol peel. The type of peel and the concentration of its ingredients determine the depth of the penetration and associated recovery time. It is very important to have trained individuals familiar with your skin condition and medical history to apply a peel. Complications from peels can be serious and are sometimes irreversible.

The AHA peel is the lightest peel category, and by far, the most popular. These are the "fruit acid peels," and include glycolic peels, lactic peels, and citrus acid peels. They work by destroying the adhesive of surface layer skin cells and shedding dead skin. These are often referred to as "lunchtime peels," reflecting the minimal downtime associated with the peel. After the AHA peel, the skin has a pink, rosy appearance that diminishes within a day or so. Within a couple of days, the skin begins exfoliation through flaking. Depending on the level of preparation of the skin, as well as the concentration of the peel itself,



the flaking can be mild to heavy. Normally, this treatment does not peel the skin in sheets. Results are cumulative; these peels are often performed in a series of four to six sessions, spaced two to three weeks apart. This concentration of treatments is often effective in treating skin irregularities that might otherwise require a deeper peel. Very light varieties of this type of peel are available over the counter in your local drugstore; however, these OTC peels often have very low concentrations of the acids and their usefulness is limited.

The Trichloroacetic Acid Peel is a more intense peel, yet it is regarded as a medium-level peel. Depending on the concentration of acids used, the TCA peel works by destroying deeper layers of skin tissue. The result is often mild discomfort, and possibly minor swelling. Heavy flaking and peeling are common. The new skin usually heals enough within a week to return to normal activities. However, patients should avoid the sun for several months in order to protect the newly formed skin. Two or more TCA peels may be required, often spaced over several months.

The deepest level of peel uses a Phenol solution. This acid solution penetrates deep into the layers of skin and is usually a one-time procedure, with long-term results. These peels are usually effective in treating deep wrinkles, severe pigmentation, pre-cancerous growths, and scarring. Frequently, with this peel, the skin loses its ability to tan, making it always necessary to wear very strong sun protection. The uses of lasers for skin resurfacing have made this level of peel unnecessary for many.

The versatility for correcting cosmetic irregularities makes opting for a peel a popular choice. Who administers your peel is as important as deciding what type of peel is right for you. It is important to have a trained staff that works closely with you to decide if a chemical peel is the right choice for you, and that your medical history is considered when deciding on which type of peel you use. The results can be amazing! 🍊

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