

(Parkland Life Column for January 2009)
Healthy Resolution for 2009: Proactive Skin Care
By David J. Levens, MD, PA, FACS

Resolving to get in shape and take better care of yourself in '09?

Don't forget about your skin.

Proper, consistent facial skin care is the most effective, least invasive and most affordable way to correct many conditions which can add years to your looks--oversized pores, rough texture, discoloration, surface wrinkles, chronic dryness and sun damage.

Skin care technology continues to advance at a brisk pace, creating products and treatments which produce far greater results than were possible as recently as five or ten years ago. For example, the new VI Peel is a painless phenol peel that takes only 20 minutes, has no downtime, and does an excellent job on age spots and fine wrinkles. It even stimulates collagen production to make skin look firmer.

However, it is important to remember that corrective skin care is a process, not an event. Just as one trip to the gym doesn't change a person's physique, one corrective skin treatment won't resolve years of damage. Repeated treatments are usually needed to re-educate skin cells. Peels can remove the outer layer of facial skin but if the cells beneath haven't been "retrained" through repeated corrective treatments, the skin will grow back with many of its original problems. Home care products, when "prescribed" by a professional aesthetician who has assessed the patient's skin quality, are essential to achieving a successful retraining of skin cells.

So, how long does it take for corrective skin care without surgery to produce definite, visible improvement in facial skin? The answer depends upon the quality of the patient's skin and the nature of the problem—acne scars, large pores, texture issues, discoloration and so forth. Sometimes, obvious improvement is seen after a relatively short series of treatments. Often, it takes regular visits for many months. Most skin problems—like most figure problems--didn't develop overnight. It took time to create the problem; it takes time to correct it.

Many patients who invest time and money in corrective skin care view it the same way they view joining a gym or hiring a trainer: an investment that achieves desired results in the long run. Others put such treatments in the same category as monthly manicures, pedicures or haircuts: something you do for yourself because it improves your overall appearance.

Proper skin care will also pay dividends down the line for patients who eventually opt for cosmetic surgery. Facial skin which has been properly cleansed, toned, moisturized and protected throughout a patient's lifetime tends to respond much better to both invasive and non-invasive cosmetic surgery treatments than neglected skin does. Like their patients, surgeons want to achieve the best possible results. Indeed, most surgeons require pre-op corrective skin care treatments to prepare the skin for such procedures as facelift, eyelid/brow surgery, laser skin resurfacing and the like. Such treatments might include deep cleansing facials, light peels, dermabrasion, hydrating facials and other techniques.

Resolving today to make proactive skin care a priority for '09 is a sure way to have something healthy to celebrate all year long.

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