

# Pre- and Post-Operative Skin Care

by Anne C. Willis

At the beginning of my career medical skin rejuvenation was, in no other words, barbaric. Phenol peels and dermabrasion, (not to be confused with microdermabrasion) were the primary skin resurfacing procedures. Skin was chemically or mechanically scraped to the point of resembling hamburger meat. Laser, TCA, microdermabrasion, Retin-A, and Obagi came 15 years after I began, and though these procedures are less invasive, the frequency of their application have become far more detrimental to the skin.

I was among the first aestheticians in the country to introduce pre- and post-operative therapies. There were many challenges with this new division of skin care. Getting doctors to implement phyto-therapies instead of Crisco and Vaseline was like getting a two year old to eat spinach instead of Cheerios. But over time, through charting results and cataloging before and after photos, we have been able to implement many changes to protocols. Integrating traditional skin therapies along with the medical model continues to be a challenge. As the overriding desire to remain healthy and look vital is at the forefront, so is the need to reassess the current medical protocols for skin resurfacing procedures. There is always something for an observant aesthetician to discover. The physical properties and chemical composition of the skin is altered with medical procedures and pre- and post-operative care will largely determine the patient's results and outcome for healing and prevent pathologies, like skin cancers and telangiectasia.





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## Risk Factors

Creating protocols for pre- and post-skin therapy will reduce complications and ensure a healthy outcome. However, there are risk factors with any medical procedure. Some of the risks that accompany skin resurfacing include:

- Impact on other barrier functions
- Skin complications
- Compromise of patient's quality of life
- Interruptions, reductions, or discontinuations of skin therapy sessions
- Impaired health of skin
- Prolonged healing time
- Risk of skin cancers occurring

Organs that function as barriers are lungs, large intestines, and skin. When one barrier is disturbed they are all impacted. It is important to review the patient's health history for pre-existing health concerns like IBS, diverticulitis, colitis, allergies, asthma, or frequent colds. Trauma to the skin will exasperate anyone of these pre-existing conditions.

Skin complications can be reduced tremendously by preparing the skin for any medical procedure. Complications can vary depending on the procedure. Ensuring that skin is at optimal health by managing skin allergies, increasing essential fatty acids, reducing inflammation, and adding dietary grade ingredients to the skin can reduce the risk of complications. Lymphatic manipulations pre-operatively reduce post procedure swelling and improve healing. Having a patient use a home care regime for at least one month prior to a procedure ensures the compatibility of the product with the skin. Motivating a patient to eat healthy and reduce stressful lifestyle choices prior to a medical procedure can reduce many complications. There has been a link to anti-depressants causing disturbance to blood coagulation and thus causing complications with healing. If a patient indicates that they are taking anti-depressants please notify their doctor immediately.<sup>1</sup>

When patients experience any of the risk factors being discussed, the quality of life is compromised. Patients undergo a procedure to look younger, refreshed, and more vital. They want to get back to their

lifestyle and activities as soon as possible. If they experience a complication, their lifestyle and quality of life is compromised. Providing pre-operative skin treatments reduces these complications and allows the patient to walk away with a positive experience.

When complications occur there can be an interruption, reduction, or discontinuation of post-operative skin therapy sessions and in the case of cancer patient's discontinuation of chemotherapy and radiations can be fatal. The aesthetician may be limited on administering therapies, which can delay recovery time, affect results, and lead to a compromise in the patient's quality of life. Pre-operative skin care sessions reduce the chance of complications and ensure that post therapies can be administered.

Another risk factor is impairment to skin health. Impairment includes hypertrophic scar formation, acne forma, follicular eruptions, sun sensitivity, hyperpigmentation, and skin cancers.<sup>2</sup>

There is a significant learning curve in understanding the intricacies of chemical penetration and surgical trauma to the skin. Consistency in results is achieved with experience and proper pre-operative patient evaluation. Pre-operative therapies begin anywhere from one month to two weeks prior to the procedure. Getting familiar with the constitution of one's skin hastens complications. Administering a skin resurfacing procedure without skin therapy sessions can be a prelude for skin reactions that could have been avoided. Pre-operatively an evaluation of skin's physical properties should include:

- Color
- Texture
- Structure
- Drainage
- Surface ecology

**Color** – Redness is an indication of inflammation of the skin and should be treated before a medical procedure is administered. Inflammation is a free radical, which undermines healing and skin recovery. It weakens the capillary bed, which supports blood vessels, thus inhibiting the transport of necessary nutrients and oxygen for healing.

**Texture** – The stratified cells should be intact. Compromise to the stratum corneum will immediately put the skin in defense mode, initiating the barrier function to over proliferate. Thus, skin texture should be moist and smooth, but not disturbed.

**Structure** – The depth and structure of skin should demonstrate good resistance to friction. If you pulse the skin with a facial compress and the skin responds

with redness, this indicates that the structure is weak and will experience adverse reactions to medical procedures.

**Drainage** – Lymphatic obstruction will undermine healing. Administering lymphatic manipulation insures that cells are flushed of toxins and stagnant fluid is filtered and drained, thus reducing edema and creating a healthy environment for skin recovery.



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Before - Post-Operative Care



After - Post-Operative Care

**Surface Ecology** – The surface ecology should possess proper hygiene, adequate sebum, and stratified cells must be intact. Supplementation with antioxidants and nutrients, support natural defense and prevents future skin abnormalities. Over exfoliation or peeling pre-operatively may intensify the depth of the peel; however it puts the skin in defense mode, initiating activation of melanin, immune response, and over production of sebum.

### Post-Operative Skin Therapy

#### Treatment Application

- Comprehensive assessment
- Prescription implementation with non-carcinogenic ingredients
- Monitoring of skin response to treatment
- Product removal through bathing with compresses
- Gentle skin activation

Post skin resurfacing and/or surgery a comprehensive assessment of the skin is in order. Begin by observing any changes to skin ecology, such as temperature, color, texture, and watch to see if any of the epidermal skin defenses are over proliferating. Observation is the best prescription for recovery.

Implementation of a protocol that includes non-toxic, non-irritating skin care solutions is essential. The skin is more permeable and reactive, thereby absorbing solutions more readily.

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A holistic approach assures that there are no long-term effects caused by harmful ingredients.

Observe how the skin responds to treatment. I suggest that all treatments begin with a hydrotherapy compress. This is the weakest delivery of solutions. Skin can have a negative response to the temperature of the practitioner's hands. The skin needs to be able to adjust as its sensory organs decide what is of value in its recovery.

Skin resurfacing exposes delicate living cells, while chemotherapy and radiation thins the skin making it more fragile. It is recommended to bath the skin with compresses instead of applying a product and wiping it off. Effleurage should be avoided. Gentle skin activation like pressure point or lymphatic manipulation is the preferred methods.

### Patient Support

Patients need support! Medications and pain can alter cognition causing forgetfulness and/or disturbed mental clarity. Home care instructions assist patients with personal application of products and prescription plan. Just talking them through it is not enough. Demonstration and individualized instruction for product usage assures compliance and speedy recovery. Providing written guidelines for home care gives patients a physical reference. Periodic review of the patient's condition reassures complications have not developed and that the skin is responding favorably to the prescription plan. It may be necessary to alter protocols.

Recognizing the strength of these disciplines can benefit the patient and improve their immediate and long-term quality of life. Time, purpose, and now urgency brought on by the challenges of the 21st century should inspire all licensed aestheticians to embrace these principles and work to unite conventional medicine with integrative principals.

### Resources:

- <sup>1</sup> Brain Behav Immun. 2011 Jan; 25(1):168-73. Epub 2010 Sep 21. Anti-depressant medication use and C-reactive protein: results from two population-based studies.  
Hamer M, Batty GD, Marmot MG, Singh-Manoux A, Kivimaki M.
- <sup>2</sup> Dermatol Surg. 1997 Mar;23(3):191-6. Long-term efficacy and safety of Jessner's solution and 35% trichloroacetic acid vs 5% fluorouracil in the treatment of widespread facial actinic keratoses.  
Witthiler DD, Lawrence N, Cox SE, Cruz, Cockerell CJ, Freeman RG



Anne Willis has been part of the aesthetic industry for more than 30 years. She offers premier educational programs and customized training to schools and spas and is CEO of De La Terre Skincare. Her programs are taught throughout the country delivering innovative solutions and quality support. The highest standard for education insures maximum success for your staff and the facility. [info@delaterreskincare.com](mailto:info@delaterreskincare.com)

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