

# Skin care before & after laser surgery

Lasers are used to treat many different skin conditions. Pulsed dye laser (PDL) is commonly used in pediatric patients to treat birthmarks made of blood vessels. It can also be used to treat other skin problems. Taking care of your skin before and after the laser procedure is very important to make sure the treatment is successful. This will also help prevent problems or complications.

Talk to your provider about what to do and expect before, during, and after the laser surgery and how to best take care of the treated area. The effectiveness of the laser depends on several factors. You can help your child have the best results by following these recommendations:

## BEFORE LASER SURGERY

### >> STARTING 1 MONTH BEFORE LASER SURGERY

- » Avoid allowing the sun to tan the area that will be treated. A suntan can interfere with the effect of the laser. Therefore, it is important to minimize suntan 1 month before the laser surgery.
- » Wear sunscreen. Even if you are good at avoiding the sun, use a broad spectrum and >50 SPF sunscreen daily.
- » If the area that will be treated is in a sun-exposed area, covering it with a bandage can also provide extra sun protection.

### >> STARTING 1 WEEK BEFORE LASER SURGERY

- » Do not take aspirin, ibuprofen, or similar medications. These medications can thin the blood, increasing bruising and bleeding after laser.
- » Practice covering your child's eyes with sunglasses or swim goggles. This will demonstrate how eye protection will be used during the laser surgery.
- » Talk about some of the loud beeping noises that the child will hear during the laser surgery.
- » Talk to your dermatologist about numbing creams that can be applied at home before treatment. These numbing creams can help to reduce discomfort.

### >> ON THE ACTUAL DAY OF LASER SURGERY

- » Do not wear sunscreen, makeup, or moisturizers in the area that will be treated; they can interfere with the laser.
- » If a numbing cream will be used, apply this at least 45 minutes before the procedure. If possible, try to "seal" the cream into the area. You can do this by covering it with a waterproof bandage (e.g., Tegaderm) or with clear plastic wrap (e.g., Saran Wrap). This should increase the numbing cream's effectiveness.

## AFTER LASER SURGERY

### >> SKIN CARE

- » In most cases, the treated area will be bruised after the laser treatment. This is part of how the laser works. The bruise may take 7 to 14 days to go away.

## AFTER LASER SURGERY (CONT.)

- » Mild swelling should be expected. An extra pillow at night can help decrease swelling if the laser surgery was performed on the face.
- » Keep the treated area clean. Wash gently with mild soap and water starting 24 hours after the procedure. Do not use a washcloth or loofah, and do not rub the skin. Instead, gently use your hands or clean gauze to dab the treated area clean.
- » Keep the treated area moisturized. Petrolatum-based emollients are often recommended to use after the laser treatment until the skin has completely healed.
- » Do not scratch, pick, or rub the area that was treated. Avoid any trauma to the area. The treated area might need to be covered to prevent picking or rubbing.
- » Apply any prescription medications as instructed by your dermatologist.

## >> SUN PROTECTION

- » Avoid direct sun exposure for at least 1 month after the laser treatment.
- » Regular use of sunscreen, sun protective clothing, and hats will help to make sure the skin heals well.
- » Continue to practice sun protection if more treatments are planned. Laser procedures should not be performed on tanned skin.

## >> PAIN

- » Your child may experience discomfort of the treated area. Pain is usually mild. It is most common in the few hours following the laser treatment. It can be similar to having a sunburn.
- » Moisturizers can be kept cold in the refrigerator. This can help soothe the skin. Aloe vera can also be helpful.
- » Avoid direct heat or icepacks as these can damage the treated areas. You can use cold compresses or ice packs if you use a cloth or towel between the ice pack and the skin. This can help relieve the discomfort. Ice packs can be used up to 20 minutes at a time.
- » Talk to your provider if over-the-counter acetaminophen (Tylenol®) can be given to relieve the pain. Avoid aspirin, ibuprofen, or similar medications.

## >> ACTIVITIES

- » Your provider may recommend avoiding or limiting certain activities. These may include swimming, contact sports, and outdoor activities.

### CALL YOUR DOCTOR OR SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION IF YOUR CHILD IS EXPERIENCING:

- » Increasing itch or pain that cannot be controlled with moisturizers, cold compresses, or over-the-counter pain relievers
- » Blistering or crusting
- » Discharge, pus, or redness spreading outside of the treated area
- » Fever or chills

### TEENAGERS

- » Make sure to let the medical team know if you are taking a medication called doxycycline, which is commonly prescribed for acne. It can interfere with the laser surgery.
- » Avoid shaving the area if there are crusts. You can resume shaving once crusts resolve.
- » If there are no crusts, water-based makeup can be applied two days after treatment. Remove makeup using oil-based remover, baby oil, or cold cream. Be gentle and do not rub the area.



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