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SKIN CARE

An Advance Against Acne

A vacuumlike device is defeating some really tough cases

By Lindsay Lyon

In the war against her acne, Veronica Prudencio was losing. Proactiv Solution, Clearasil, Murad, Neutrogena, grease-free diets, medical spa treatments, lemon juice, rice water facials—none of them worked. Not even remotely. Prudencio, 22, a recent college graduate from Springfield, Va., says she “spent thousands upon thousands of dollars and tried everything.”

Desperate, Prudencio decided to test out a recently approved treatment that dermatologists and patients alike describe as a breakthrough. In photopneumatic therapy, the skin is suctioned with a vacuumlike device—bringing the bad stuff to the surface—then beamed with intense pulsed light. The two-pronged process stuns and shrinks hyperactive oil glands and kills the bacteria they nourish, quashing the source of breakouts in a 20-minute swoop. While the treatment is not a cure, pimples begin to dry out and gradually disappear following subsequent sessions. “My face was covered in pimples,” says Prudencio, who noticed some improvement after two rounds of treatment. She has undergone 10 rounds to date. “Now, it’s 100 percent better.”

Several small studies reveal high rates of acne clearing among patients for

whom topical creams and oral antibiotics simply don’t work. Even when they do work, traditional drugs can take months to produce results; this therapy typically brings improvement after just three sessions, says Gilly Munavalli, a clinical instructor of dermatology at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine who led one of the trials (and received a dis-

short-lived redness or slight swelling. Isaacson advises darker-skinned patients to proceed with caution, however. The pulsed-light component of treatment can cause pigmentation changes.

In check. “I don’t like to be the first adopter of new therapies, but the science is sound,” says dermatologist Amy Derick, a member of the American Academy of Dermatology who doesn’t yet use the photopneumatic device. The machine, called Isolaz, got Food and Drug Administration clearance in 2006 to tackle mild-to-moderate acne. Because of its “off-label” success against severe nodular and cystic acne, the manufacturer is

now seeking approval for those types, too. “At one point, there was not a clear spot on my face,” says Karen Nagel Farlow, 50, a nurse from Charlotte, N.C., who developed severe cystic acne as an adult. A year of occasional treatments has kept flare-ups in check. “My friends say, ‘Wow! Whatever you’re doing, it’s working.’”

A payoff this good comes at a price—and insurance generally won’t cover it. Patients should expect to fork over between \$150 and \$500 per session, depending on geographic location. And since there’s really no cure

for acne—most treatments aim to suppress breakouts until the body can overcome its hormonal flux—“maintenance sessions” every couple of months or so will probably be necessary, Isaacson says.

The cost, for Prudencio, has been well worth it, even though she’s been on a student budget. “I don’t feel like people are staring at me anymore. It’s just so much easier to leave the house,” she says. “And that’s priceless.” ●



SUCKED UP. The technique stuns overactive oil glands and kills bacteria.

counted device from the manufacturer).

“It’s probably the most effective mechanical device on the market,” says Dale Isaacson, the dermatologist who treated Prudencio. He has no financial ties to the company. “It works in about 90 percent of [our patients].” He and others usually recommend a five-treatment minimum for best results. Side effects are reportedly mild: Patients say the technique is pretty painless and, at most, causes



6634 Owens Drive, Pleasanton, CA 94588 877.275.4779 925.737.2100 www.AESTHERA.com Welisten@AESTHERA.com www.ISOLAZ.com

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