

Acne Scarring

Skincare

Any treatment program begins with a good home skin care program to prevent acne and to promote skin healing and scar reduction.

Treatment Options

Dermabrasion (Surgical Planning or Sanding)

- Dermabrasion or surgical planning is a method of flattening and improving the appearance of the skin by carefully removing specific layers of the skin, which may contain acne scars, surface irregularities, or various types of skin growths. For years, Dermabrasion was the preferred method of treatment. However, the use of Lasers for controlled skin abrasion is usually recommended.

Treatments with Downtime

Laser Resurfacing for Acne Scarring

- For over two decades, Pima Dermatology has used a variety of Lasers to achieve the best results for acne scar revision. There are two basic types of Lasers now used for acne scar treatment: the **CO2 Laser** and the **Erbium:YAG Laser**. The CO2 Laser, is used for deeper, more severe scarring while the Erbium:YAG is used for more superficial defects and in darker skin types. Most often a combination of both Lasers is utilized for optimal results.
- These Lasers are used as an office-based treatment with local anesthesia and sedation, or at a local surgery center under general anesthesia. The areas to be lasered are treated and other non-treated areas may be peeled using a chemical agent to better blend treated and non-treated areas.
- Some very large, angular or punched-out scars may be removed by surgical excision several months prior to or at the time of the procedure. Healing after the procedure depends on the depth of the treatment, but usually occurs within 7-14 days. Some redness may be present for weeks to several months following the procedure.

Treatments with Minimal or No Downtime

Skin Remodeling using Infrared Lasers

- At Pima Dermatology, we have several less aggressive options for improvement of acne scars, which cause little or no downtime.
- These options include the **Smoothbeam Laser** which has been used successfully for a number of years for improvement of both acne and acne scarring. The Smoothbeam Laser decreases the activity of the oil glands and creates a trigger for collagen remodeling and scar improvement. Another option is the **Gentle:YAG Laser** which can gently stimulate scar remodeling with virtually no disruption of one's daily routine. To optimize results this Laser can be combined with the **VBeam Laser**, especially if the scars are relatively young and red.
- Both the **Smoothbeam and Gentle:YAG Laser** options typically require multiple monthly treatments (often 4-6) to obtain the best results. The advantage with these two Lasers is that there is only mild redness and temporary swelling for 24-36 hours following the treatment. Usually one may return to normal activities within several days.
- Another treatment for acne scarring is **Fractional Laser**. With the **StarLux Fractional Laser** we offer a relatively painless procedure which sends an array of Laser beams into the upper layer of the skin to stimulate scar remodeling. There is a bit more redness and swelling after treatment, but most people resume normal activity after several days. Optimal results are obtained after a series of treatments. This treatment is also used for Laser skin toning and improvement of sun-damaged skin.

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Frequently Asked Questions:

How does Dermabrasion or Laser resurfacing work to improve acne scars?

These techniques work by creating a controlled abrasion of the skin, relying on the skin's natural healing capacity to heal the treated area in a smooth, scarless manner. Much as a superficial scrape on the knee often heals without a trace, facial skin is very rich in normal healing elements, allowing for an excellent healing response. Dr. Goldberg will usually use a combination of Laser techniques to sculpt and recontour the shoulders of the scars, utilizing the CO2 and/or Erbium Lasers to obtain the best result. By smoothing the raised contours of the scars, stimulating a tightening and remodeling of the skin's collagen, a more even skin texture is achieved.

How much improvement can I expect from a single Laser Resurfacing treatment?

While our goal is to achieve a perfect result with a single procedure, this is usually not obtainable. Most patients will achieve an improvement of a least 50% in the depth, and severity of scars and overall skin texture. This is a reasonable expectation with a single treatment. The amount of improvement can be enhanced with excisions to selected large or sharply demarcated scars prior to, or at the time of, the procedure. A second treatment is often advised after about one year to obtain an even better result.

In general, the final result is related to the type and amount of lesions present and the patient's ability to produce good wound healing. Many patients will achieve more than a reasonable improvement in their skin problem. As with any surgical procedure, it is not possible to accurately predict or guarantee the quality of results. And, in some instances, improvements may be negligible. There is no surgical procedure which can remove all skin defects.

Is the Laser Skin Resurfacing Treatment painful?

Most of the treatments are performed in our office using a combination of anesthetic methods. First the skin is numbed using a topical anesthetic such as LMX cream. This cream is applied one to two hours prior to the procedure. This topical anesthesia is then supplemented with intramuscular injection of an analgesic (i.e. Demerol) and oral sedation with an agent such as Valium. Anesthesia is then augmented with local skin injections to further complete skin anesthesia. While the procedure is not totally painless, our staff will go to great lengths to keep you comfortable throughout the procedure and during the entire healing phase.

Many full-face treatments are performed at the outpatient surgery center under general anesthesia with an anesthesiologist present. In this case the procedure is virtually pain free, but has additional costs and the added risk of general anesthesia.

How long does the skin take to heal after the treatment?

Most patients will heal within 7-14 days. Healing is related to the patient's innate healing response (longer for a smoker), skin preparation prior to the procedure, dressing used after the procedure and the depth of treatment necessary to remove the scars. There can be persistent redness in some individuals, which lasts for weeks and in rare instances 6 months or more. Most people will be able to wear makeup by day 10 and return to work or normal daily activity within 10-14 days.

What are the risks of the procedure?

Like any surgical procedure there are certain risks and side effects of treatment. The most common risk is a disturbance in color or pigment in the skin after the procedure. Sometimes the treated skin may appear slightly lighter or darker in color than the untreated areas. Darker pigment is usually temporary and can be treated with skin lightening creams, with improvement over several weeks to months. Lighter pigment is more common after deeper treatments, especially with the CO2 laser, and is more evident when partial treatments are done. Dr. Goldberg will usually recommend a feathering treatment adjacent to treated areas using the Erbium Laser or a chemical peel to minimize any permanent color mismatch. There is always a risk of infection, although we have seldom experienced this problem since we use an open healing technique after the procedure (no occlusive dressings). In addition, preventative antibiotics and an antiviral are used at the time of and after the procedure. The risk of scarring is present, but fortunately is very rare and is correctable using a variety of medical techniques. We minimize complications with exquisite attention to detail during the procedure and during all critical phases of care after the procedure.

Does insurance cover acne scar revision?

Acne scar revision by Dermabrasion or Laser treatment is not a covered benefit in most insurance plans. These treatments are usually considered cosmetic or not medically necessary. Therefore, the responsibility for payment is with the individual. Costs of treatment are discussed as part of your consultation.

To schedule a consultation, please contact us at 520.795.7729.