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Going for the burn: How a face peel works

Glycolic acid "lunchtime peels" are the hot skin-care craze.

These fruit acid face peels consist of six to eight treatments done over weeks or months. A typical procedure: The dermatologist or skin-care specialist has you use a glycolic cream at home for several weeks. Before the peel, skin is prepped with alcohol and acetone to get rid of all oils.

Next, glycolic acid is rubbed on the skin. Small fans are held near the face as the solution is left on for a few minutes, then rinsed off with cold water. A neutralizer cream is applied.

How will you look afterward? Either red or slightly frosted. The white effect can last from 30 seconds to a few minutes. Then you look flushed, similar to a mild sunburn. "Some patients think it makes them look like they have a healthy glow, like they've been to the beach," says dermatologist Tina Alster.

The second day your face will feel tight, just as if a mask is tightening on your face. "You've damaged the outer layer of skin," Alster explains.

On the third day, you may peel, but you may not. "I see a lot of patients on Thursday



By Matt Mendelsohn, USA TODAY
BEAUTY TREATMENT: Dr. Tina Alster and assistant Georgina Zogby give Elaine Shapiro a fruit acid facial peel.

or Friday so they have the weekend to peel," Alster says.

Most doctors use a solution of 40%-70% glycolic acid. A close eye is kept on the skin's reaction; the acid is left on for only minutes.

The treatments generally cost from \$100 to \$500 apiece. Alster recommends asking to see before and after photos of peels. "Make sure the photos are theirs, not the product manufacturers'. If they've been doing peels for a while, they

should have pictures of their work."

The FDA frowns on peels done anywhere but at a trained physician's office by a board-certified dermatologist. Alster underwent one so she would know what it felt like: "While the acid is in contact with the skin (from 2-5 minutes), it can feel like a major burn. But as soon as the neutralizer is put on, that stops. Most patients grin and bear it. Some take a Valium or Motrin. There's no screaming."