Fractional carbon dioxide (CO$_2$) laser treatment: After treatment care

This information explains how to care for your skin after fractional CO$_2$ laser treatment, especially for treatment of scars. For other skin changes, your laser operator will give you further information. For general information about the treatment, please refer to the patient information leaflet “Fractional carbon dioxide (CO$_2$) laser treatment” which you will already have received.

**Day of laser treatment:**
The treated skin will look red and swollen. Small white dots will be visible from the laser treatment. These appear where the laser hits the skin and are normal. We will discharge you with a light coat of anti-bacterial cream. The treated skin will be sore once the local anaesthetic wears off. You can use standard over-the-counter painkillers to reduce the pain.

The treated skin will be oozing a clear or slightly yellowish fluid and begin to form crusts.

To prevent infection and keep the skin moist, perform the **cleaning/moisturising procedure as below:**

- Wash and dry your hands thoroughly, lather your hands with the anti-bacterial ointment given to you and dab it lightly onto the treated skin. Do not rub in. Leave on for 1 – 2 minutes.

- Rinse off with diluted vinegar (make a bottle by adding 2 caps of white vinegar to 2 litres of water).

- Finally, apply a thin coat of antibacterial ointment to keep the area moist.

You can repeat this procedure every 2 – 3 hours or less often, depending on how quickly crusts re-form.

**1 – 2 days after treatment:**
The treated skin will still look red and swollen but gradually less than on the first day. The small dots will turn red or brown.

You can take a shower but do not directly let the shower beam hit the treated skin to avoid injury and scarring.

There will still be oozing of clear or slightly yellowish fluid and crusting. This is normal. Do not pick crusts. Follow the cleaning/moisturising procedure described above every 2 – 3 hours on the first day and up to 4 times on the second day, or less often, depending on how often the crusts re-appear.
Remember not to rub the ointment, but only dab it on.

You can perform your normal activities but avoid strenuous exercise to reduce sweating in the face.

**3 – 4 days after treatment:**
The skin swelling will settle but the redness will remain and some flaking of skin will occur. Do not pick flakes or scabs/crust but repeat the cleaning/moisturising procedure to remove them. The skin may itch and standard over-the-counter antihistamines may reduce this.

**5 – 8 days after treatment:**
Your skin may appear slightly pink like mild sunburn and the crusting and oozing will now stop. Repeat the cleaning/moisturising procedure only as needed, depending on crusts still forming. You can apply make-up to conceal the treated area if necessary.

**General**
Avoid direct UV light for 4 – 6 weeks after your laser treatment in order to minimise the risk of skin colour changes.

**When and how to seek medical attention**
As described above, some redness and swelling on the first day after fractional CO₂ laser treatment, as well as mild to moderate soreness of the treated skin is normal. However, if you experience one of the following, you should contact the Dermatology Department on 01382 632259.

The redness and the swelling does not become less, but rather more intense during the first 1 – 2 days and the pain becomes severe rather than gradually improving.

Bleeding occurs, pus is notable, cold sores appear and you develop a fever.

In the first instance, we would attempt to arrange an immediate review appointment for you. If this is not possible (for example, on a weekend), we would ask that you contact your GP or NHS24.