



IN THE WAR ON AGING, nothing has redrawn the battle lines as much as the advent of noninvasive procedures (hello, Botox!). These days, plastic surgery seems so last century. Nowhere is the advancement in technology as rapid as with non-ablative lasers, which emit beams of light that target cells deep within the skin to stimulate collagen while leaving the surface unharmed. It's easy to see why women are clamoring for some laser love: Those powerful beams can improve the appearance of fine lines, sun damage, laxity, and acne scars with little or no risk of scarring, and minimal downtime. "There has been a huge boom in lasers, particularly Fraxel," says New York dermatologist Elizabeth Hale. "Even women who don't want injectables are asking for it because you can rejuvenate the whole face without a drastic change in appearance."

The term "minimal downtime" is open to interpretation. I've had Fraxel, and while I loved the end results (glow, baby, glow), I looked like I had an epic sunburn for the first few days—that is, before my skin began flaking off like confetti. "Fraxel, and other fractional lasers, use light energy to pierce thousands of tiny holes into the skin's collagen layer, like pinholes in a pegboard," says New York dermatologist Ellen Marmur. "This restores collagen and elastin while removing excess pigment, laxity, and broken blood vessels." Skin heals relatively quickly, thanks to the undamaged skin surrounding the lasered areas. Translation: a smoother, tighter, and more evenly toned complexion—eventually.

Along with the not always minimal downtime, though, Fraxel can require multiple trips to a dermatologist (at about \$1,000 a pop), anesthetic, and Valium. Until now. The FDA has just cleared the first and only full-face, non-ablative fractional laser for personal use on all skin types, the Tria Age-Defying Laser (\$495; triabeauty.com). "It has the same interaction with skin that you get in an office procedure, but it operates on a lower percentage of skin at a time," says Zakia Rahman, a clinical assistant professor of dermatology at Stanford and a consulting dermatologist on the Tria clinical studies. In a clinical trial, 95 percent of those who tried the Tria saw smoother skin. Getting those results takes patience, however. Because it's less potent than an in-office laser, the Tria is designed to be used for 12 weeks, five nights a week. "The result will

be the same as two office treatments," Rahman says. And while dermatologists see the potential benefits of the Tria, many point out that because it treats a smaller area of skin than in-office treatments, results will be less dramatic. Still, they caution, it is not a tool to be taken lightly. "It's imperative that you follow the instructions exactly," says New Orleans dermatologist Mary Lupo. "Overtreating the same area can cause welts or blisters." Adds Hale: "The Tria will be best for early signs of sun damage and fine lines. For deeper acne scarring, you need an office procedure."

After watching the instructional video, which warns of a "slight stinging or warming sensation," I must admit I felt a little trepidatious, but the promise of a glorious glow spurred me on. I turned on the Tria's small handheld wand—it has three power levels—and no laser beams came shooting out, just a lavender light. I started with Level 1, which takes about 30 seconds

for each of the four areas of the face. While I wouldn't call it pain-free (think a gazillion pinpricks), it was bearable. Afterward, my face was magenta, but it faded.

Danika, 39, who lives in Canada, where the Tria has been available for more than a year, is a devotee. "I wasn't nervous about trying it, and I knew it wasn't as strong as a laser in a doctor's office," she says. Danika quickly soldiered on to Level 3, which takes about 10 minutes per treatment. "I looked kind of sun-kissed for the first week, but I started seeing results." After eight weeks she took a one-month hiatus. "You see the biggest difference after you stop," Danika says. "My crow's-feet receded, the blotchiness and sun damage

are gone, my face looks younger. Even my eyelids are tighter." Other than redness, the most prevalent side effect is dry skin. Moisturizing is not only key but can actually bring added glow. "The laser increases the absorption of peptides and antioxidants," explains Lupo, who recommends using a serum after each treatment. Sunblock is also crucial.

After a week at Level 1, I made the leap to Level 2, which doubled the amount of treatment time and, yes, burning. By the third week my brown spots were fading and my skin had a noticeable luminosity. I began to get unsolicited compliments on my complexion, and friends asked what I was doing differently: New serum? New foundation? I'm not up to Level 3 yet, but I'm working on it. ■

YOUR VERY OWN LASER

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