

Skin laser treatments

A limited range of skin laser treatments are available on the NHS, availability varying according to funding arrangements with your local Clinical Commissioning Group. Only conditions caused by birth, disease or accident are considered for NHS funding.

Birthmarks

The appearance of some birthmarks can be improved by laser treatment. The treatments are repeated about every 3 months and may continue for years. The types of birthmarks that can often be improved include Port Wine Stains, Naevus of Ota, and café au lait marks. The hair can be reduced in Becker's naevus. Other pigmented birthmarks do not respond well to laser.

Diseases

Telangiectasia (small blood vessels close to the skin surface) from rosacea, scleroderma or radiotherapy can be helped. Unwanted facial hair from polycystic ovary syndrome or adrenal hyperplasia can also be helped. Scarring from acne can sometimes be improved.

Accidents

laser treatment can sometimes fade persistent redness in old scars. Accidental tattoos from blast injuries or road traffic accidents can also be improved.

How does laser treatment work?

Lasers are amplifiers for light. The light is very bright and heats up anything dark. By choosing the colour of the laser light some colours can be heated up more than others. For example, a yellow laser is used for red birthmarks, and a green laser for brown ones. A cutting laser is used to help acne scars.

How can you prepare?

You should never get lasered through a suntan, as the laser is likely to damage the tan. You will need to lose any tan before starting treatment and remain pale throughout the treatment. Similarly it is often difficult to laser darker skin types. If you are having laser hair removal we will ask you to stop plucking or waxing and to only trim for a few weeks before starting treatment. Please ensure all make up is fully removed before treatment.

Afterwards

There maybe some bruising and redness afterwards. In some cases this will be quite noticeable for a week or two. It will settle on its own. Avoid using makeup for a few days and handle the treated area gently, no rubbing and blending, no picking and scratching. You will also need to keep out of the sun and avoid prolonged immersion in water.

Side effects

Your skin will be cooled to make it more comfortable. The treatment feels like being zapped by an elastic band. It can be unpleasant but only for a few minutes. Temporary side effects include bruising tenderness redness and itching. Pigment burns are possible and can take weeks to settle, the risk is less than 1 in 100 treatments. Scarring is very rare, and is usually the result of picking scabs. Everyone in the laser room must wear protective goggles.

Large print and audio versions are available.