



saddleback

dermatology laser + cosmetic center

Glycolic Acid Acne Treatments

What is Glycolic Acid?

Glycolic acid is a naturally occurring substance derived from sugar cane. It is one of a group of “hydroxy acids” which are gaining popularity in the treatment of a variety of skin disorders. They are considered to be safe, nontoxic, and are available without a prescription.

What Causes Acne?

Pimples form when pores become filled with oil due to blockage of the pore by a plug consisting of dead skin cells. Acne improves when the plugs are removed, the pores are open, and the oil can flow freely to the surface. These plugs are very firm and not easily dislodged. Because they are so firmly entrenched, squeezing and picking more likely drives the pore contents deeper into the skin rather than out to the surface. Bacteria ingest the oil, and this results in inflammation which is seen on the skin as red bumps or pimples. Acne medications work by reversing blocked pores, killing bacteria, or by reducing inflammation. Since the first in the formation of pimples is a blocked pore, this is often the most important problem to reverse when treating it.

How does Glycolic Acid Improve Acne?

An important property of glycolic acid is its ability to gently dissolve the dead skin which is responsible for blocking pores. The solution is applied to the skin and left in place until a mild burning sensation signals it is time to wash it off. The plugs which are then softened can be gently removed by our licensed medical esthetician. Removing these plugs allows the oil to flow freely, the pores are no longer distended, and the bumps go away. Although mild redness and some scaling are possible, the treated area should appear better within a few hours and normal by the next day.

Acne Requires a Combined Approach

There are several advantages to using glycolic acid treatments in addition to home medications. Whereas home medications work over weeks or months, the effect of glycolic acid is immediate. Therefore, it can reduce substantially the amount of time it takes for significant clearing to occur since many lesions can be treated at once. Some patients find the medications work better at keeping the skin clear than at making it clear. It is not uncommon for patients who are resistant to treatment to clear up with the treatments and then be able to maintain clear skin with their home medications alone. Also, a combination approach is usually more effective at clearing acne than any one treatment alone. If glycolic acid treatment has been suggested for you, it is likely that you will see substantial improvement each time it is performed.

How Many Treatments and How Often?

There is no “average” number of treatments required although it is generally recommended to do at least two, one to two weeks apart. Some patients improve and maintain that improvement with their medications alone. Others require ongoing treatments without which their acne persists or returns. Still others may go long periods without requiring treatments and will return during flare ups. Generally, once you have had one or two treatments, it will become clear how best to approach your individual needs.

How are Treatments Scheduled?

If we are a provider for your insurance carrier or submit your doctor’s visits to insurance, we will do the same for these treatments. Most insurance companies recognize acne as a medical condition and cover appropriate treatment. If you did not make an appointment at the time of your office visit, you may do so by calling the office and making an appointment with Tracy, our licensed medical esthetician who performs these treatments.

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