

stacking and combining
products and treatments

Greater Than the Sum of its Parts

by Carol and Rob Trow

As a skin care professional, every time you open up a magazine, a trade journal, an e-mail or a solicitation from one of a myriad of skin care or device companies, you are assaulted with multiple and, at times, conflicting claims. Each company says it uses the best pharmaceutical-grade ingredients or that its new device (laser, LED or IPL) is the answer to a cosmetic condition such as acne, photo-damage, pigmentation, aging, fine lines, wrinkles, lax skin, etc.

The list of claims goes on and on. Last year's solution is passé; new is better. So, is there truly one skin care product, ingredient or device that provides the magic button to ameliorating skin care conditions? We do not think so.

Putting it all together

The answer to establishing the very best skin care protocols lies in combining products and modalities from several sources. A new term, "stacking," can be applied to this skin care approach. Here are two examples of stacking: combining treatments in a series and alternating between procedures, or combining several treatments together in one session. Janet McCormick, a recognized authority on skin care, cautions that in some states, combined treatments (dual modalities) may not be allowed. So if you are planning to combine treatment protocols, check with your appropriate state authority.

A series of professional procedures and at-home products that use a variety of approaches will yield more results than a one-option approach. Offering a series using multiple protocols will also result in more client visits. And that's not a bad thing either. ➔



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A red flag

When a new ingredient comes out, many companies rush to add it to their existing formulas. The uninformed then read the manufacturers' advertisements or look at the literature and see that a product contains a plethora of ingredients—the proverbial kitchen sink. The skin care professional must be aware that while a product may contain everything under the sun, there is a simple scientific fact: combining certain ingredients that have different pHs will result in an inactive product; the ingredients literally cancel each other out. For example, combining an alpha hydroxy acid with certain vitamins, such as vitamin A, will cancel each ingredient's effectiveness because of the chemical reaction between the two. You cannot combine an acid

with a vitamin without compromising ingredient integrity. Some skin care lines manipulate the pH levels to avoid this, but it does not work. Ingredients must have similar pH levels to provide results. Learn the basics of skin ingredient science so you can educate your clients on what works and what is hype. Learn what antioxidants can and cannot accomplish. Advertising makes the public think antioxidants eliminate fine lines and wrinkles. While antioxidants do wonders at fighting free radicals, they do little with lines and wrinkles that have already formed. Their best action against wrinkles is to reduce free radicals, which will thereby reduce the development of wrinkles. Antioxidants are really just a preventive method. —C.T. and R.T.

Skin care treatment protocols

The following devices are generally available for use in treating many skin care conditions by physicians and/or estheticians (depending on state regulations): lasers (multiple types), LED, IPL, chemical peels, microdermabrasion, dermabrasion, medical needling and dermaplaning are some of the most widely used.

It is our strong belief that stacking or combining certain modalities along with professional skin treatments and at-home protocols greatly enhances the desired outcome. Mixing modalities, for example, to treat hyperpigmentation will achieve more dynamic, longer-lasting results. The results will be better than using just one device or focusing only on either office treatments or home care.

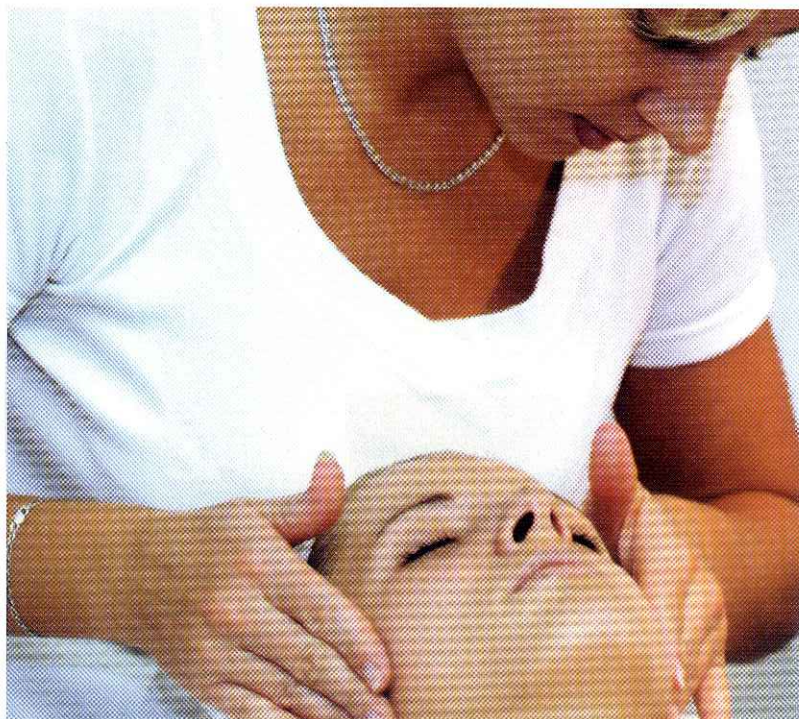
The magic button for the best possible results then is to use more than one device, combined with professional skin care treatments and a home care regimen that includes “serious,” topical, vitamin-based products.

Lasers and lights

Lasers come in many forms. The CO2 laser is very ablative and is used to remove areas of damaged or wrinkled skin, layer by layer. Some even believe this laser is effective for treating pigmentation. But with this device, there is a risk of hyper- or hypopigmentation and demarcation lines, especially for Fitzpatrick IV to VI skin types. Despite all claims, CO2 treatments won't completely address any condition. One must be mindful that the wound-healing process also affects the duration and severity of downtime and healing, which can impact results and cause complications. Treatment with the CO2 laser has become less popular because of the potential for complications and lengthy downtime.

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After “scalping” skin, repeated treatments of heavy-duty vitamin A-based products will help avoid problems.



Ruby lasers are another type of laser. These provide a short, 30 nanosecond pulse of intense red light, and are claimed to help disperse skin pigmentation (from the melanosome or a tattoo) into small enough fragment particles, which the body's own immune system can eventually remove.

For hair removal, many types of lasers can be used: Alexandrite, Ruby, Diode, ND, LP and YAG. Controlling the pulse length, fluence, delay and cooling can all affect results. Each has its advantages and disadvantages. Using protocols that combine various laser modalities produces superior results than just relying on one modality.

Adding a well thought-out professional and at-home skin care regimen to laser treatments will enhance results and the appearance of the skin. Active ingredients such as vitamins A and C, antioxidants, peptides and growth factors, as well as a sunscreen with chemical and physical blockers and antioxidants, are essential as well.

LED (light emitting diode) is a natural, non-ablative method to help with skin rejuvenation. Yellow lights assist in photo-rejuvenation, blue light works for acne treatments, red for photodynamic therapy. Combining light sources is effective. Again, combined therapies here works better. Light, cool, low-level peels (lactic acid or TCAs at no more than 10 percent) coupled with a home care regimen that includes the twice daily applications of vitamins A and C, antioxidants, peptides and growth factors, will add to the efficacy of LED. Injectables such as Botox and dermal fillers are ex-

cellent additions to these modalities. LED, just as with all types of effective, professional skin care treatments, should be preformed in a series.

IPL, intense pulse light, transmits a broad spectrum of light through a small, smooth handpiece, gently placed over the skin. The light penetrates the tissue and is absorbed by the blood for vascular issues or melanin for pigmentation. IPL can be used to assist in the reduction of erythema, flushing, photo-aging, pigmentation and some instances of acne or postsurgical scarring. But when combined with LED and a targeted skin care regimen, the results are greatly enhanced.

Microdermabrasion

Microdermabrasion exfoliates the top 10 to 20 microns of skin while dermabrasion goes to much deeper levels. Microdermabrasion is a skin refreshing procedure but without proper follow-up skin care, the results cannot be sustained. It may even make skin more susceptible to more sun damage and enhanced pigmentation problems. Therefore, pre- and post-care treatments including sun care products can enhance results while also calming the skin. The exfoliation process actually facilitates product penetration, so be sure that what is being applied works and is safe.

“Scalping” skin

Dermabrasion and dermaplaning help refinish the skin through a “controlled scalping” of the epidermis. While we are cautious about these procedures, some skin care professionals have accepted them. There are concerns about potential side effects, which may include uneven skin tone, especially in black, dark or Asian skin tones; fever blisters and cold sores, if a client has a history of such conditions; and possible scar tissue (keloid or hypertrophic) development. The use of chemical peels may be just as effective as these procedures but with less risks in many instances.

In effect, dermaplaning removes much from the stratum corneum and hence, as in microdermabrasion, exposes cells to the environment before they have been “properly matured” to endure the radical dryness, the high level of oxygen and environmental toxins. These cells are still more hydrated than the cells of the stratum corneum, so the skin looks lovely, moist, pinkish and healthy. However, these cells must quickly adapt to the environment and they dry out more rapidly. Repeated treatments of “serious” vitamin A-based products will help avoid problems. In addition, low-frequency sonophoresis treatments are also extraordinarily effective.

Needling

Medical needling, a process that ameliorates fine lines, wrinkles and acne scarring via a mechanical instrument, has been shown to be highly effective with virtually no side effects. But, failure to use skin care products, especially vitamins A and C, will cause results to be more modest. Medical

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Take note: all of the products you carry should have an expiration date visible on the external and internal packaging as well as on the product.

needling has been shown to be effective in assisting in the elimination of fine lines, wrinkles, acne scars, lax skin and the appearance of stretch marks.

Ingredients alone are not enough

Another vexing problem that we confront is packaging. Ingredients' manufacturing and packaging can be as important as the ingredients themselves. One night, we watched a commercial for a new product marketed by a well-known, international company that asserted a major breakthrough in skin care—their product now contains vitamin A, omega-3 and other ingredients. But, the product comes in a clear jar with a wide mouth. Light penetrates through to the ingredients, oxidation and damage via light occur, and contamination results when the jar is opened and either a finger or spatula is inserted. Such packaging diminishes the claimed effectiveness. But, does the consumer understand this? We think not. It is up to you, as a professional, to take on the responsibility of educating your clients to help them make better choices.

Shelf life

The same can be said about expiration dates. Active ingredients have a shelf life. All of the products you carry should have an expiration date clearly visible on the external and internal packaging and product. No ingredient is potent

forever. Most products sold in retail and beauty supply houses and to the mass market have extremely long expiration dates. In most cases, the extended shelf and use life of a product is achieved with preservatives, some of which have been questioned because of carcinogenic properties. While long shelf life is good for inventory control—it is not always so for highly effective skin care. While shorter shelf life adds inventory issues, it usually means that the products are stronger and more active. Look for skin care companies that have small or “no minimum” orders and fast ship times. There is no need to maintain large inventories. They tie up your capital and can result in less active products. Let the manufacturers and distributors be your stockroom. You should expect your order within five days. Inventory levels should be based on maintaining an attractive presentation and no more than one month's supply of any particular product. If you are worried about the shelf appearance of carrying only three deep—and we know six deep is more appealing to the consumer—ask the company for three dummies to back up the display if you only expect to sell three of an item in a month.

No perfect answer

Combining multiple device treatments, professional skin treatments and at-home use of efficacious products result in a far superior outcome than the use of one type of device or strictly topical products.

Lee Ann Pettit, owner of Spa Auburn, has an expression she tells her clients: “It's only skin; but, it's your only skin.” There is no one magic answer. The best results can be found in a three-pronged approach. First, carefully select several devices and use them in series; second, establish a complementary professional treatment series; and, third, just as vital, make sure your patients or clients understand that home care is just as essential, if not more so than the first two steps. Healthy skin is beautiful skin. Remember, it can take some time to achieve visible, sustainable and measurable results. ■

Rob Trow and his wife **Carol** own *DermaConcepts USA, the Eastern United States (excluding metro New York City) distributors for Environ Skin Care. Rob's background includes two decades in higher education as a faculty member, administrator and business consultant. He has been in the skin care field for more than 10 years. Rob is a published author and frequent speaker on current and emerging topics of interest to medical spas, estheticians and physicians. He holds two master's degrees and completed his doctoral studies at Harvard University.*

