



Aesthetic Complications Expert Group

Chemical Peels





Patient Information Leaflet

Chemical Peels

When considering treatment with **chemical peels** we want you to have a safe treatment. Some risks are unavoidable and out of your control. The following information should allow you to know what to expect and what you should ask of your practitioner.

What are chemical peels?

Chemical peels can be used to reduce the appearance of uneven pigmentation, acne and other skin problems and can rejuvenate sun-damaged skin, stimulating the growth of new skin cells making your skin appear healthier and younger. They are non-invasive and have few side effects, but are quickly effective, much more so than prolonged use of expensive creams that fail to live up to their claims.

Chemical peels are one of the oldest cosmetic treatments performed, dating back to ancient Egyptian times when, natural acids derived from fruit and milk were applied to the skin in the name of beauty. As knowledge and science have advanced, chemical peels are much more sophisticated and specific to a variety of skin problems, including uneven pigmentation, dull, dry or oily skin, wrinkles, blocked pores and acne.

There are three basic types of chemical peels:

1. Superficial: Acting on the uppermost layer of the epidermis with temporary results.
2. Medium depth: Acting on the uppermost layer of the dermis, often causing a stinging or burning sensation.
3. Deep: Penetrating as far as the basement membrane of the skin and sometimes beyond.

Chemical peels may contain the following ingredients:

- Alpha hydroxyl acids (AHA); glycolic acid 30-50% (from sugar cane), citric acid (from citrus fruits), lactic acid (from sour milk), malic acid (from apples).
- Beta hydroxyl acids (BHA); salicylic Acid (from the bark of the willow tree).
- Trichloroacetic acid (TCA); related to vinegar, may be superficial to deep depending on concentration.
- Phenol; usually in deeper chemical peels.
- Hydrogen peroxide; usually used to increase depth of penetration of other ingredients.
- Kojic acid; a fungal metabolite to help lighten the skin.
- Retinoic acid; vitamin A derivative, used to increase cell turnover.
- Glutathione; a potent anti-oxidant.



Some peels combine different acids in branded formulas and not all peels are the same, as different brands may add ingredients for additional benefits.

The above list is not exhaustive.

How do they work?

AHAs promote exfoliation of the upper most layer of the skin allowing healthier cells to the top and improving the texture and feel of the skin.

Salicylic Acid promotes exfoliation, unclogs blocked pores by breaking down oils, is antibacterial and anti-inflammatory so is particularly appropriate for acne prone skin. Also suitable for back and chest.

TCA, depending on the concentration, penetrates through the top five layers of the epidermis to the upper most layer of the dermis. Unlike superficial peels, you will find your skin becomes dry and tight, it may darken before peeling. The peeling usually begins on day 3 and continues for 2 or 3 days. Suitable for other areas of the body and for darker skin types.

Phenol Peels are the deepest of peels and may only be performed once. Only suitable for the face. Not suitable for darker skin types. Sedatives and anaesthetics may be required and also heart monitoring if the entire face is to be treated, because phenol is toxic to the heart if

absorbed in large doses. Dramatic results on lines and wrinkles can be achieved but the risks of either hyper or hypopigmentation, infection and scarring are greater.

There are many other ingredients and certain acids may be modified to enhance their results or safety profiles, so it is important to speak to your practitioner about any peel that you intend to be treated with.

Does it hurt?

Superficial peels may sting, prickle or feel hot for a brief minute or two, but are not described as painful. Medium depth peels do feel hot, a cool fan helps you manage this unpleasant sensation and it passes within minutes. Deep peels are painful and will require prescribed medications to help manage any pain, during and after the treatment.

What are they used to treat?

- ✓ Dull, tired looking skin
- ✓ Pigmentation
- ✓ Oily or dry skin conditions
- ✓ Fine lines and wrinkles
- ✓ Acne prone skin
- ✓ Open pores
- ✓ Deeper peels required for deep wrinkles and skin laxity.

Results will depend upon several factors, including the type of peel, skin preparation and aftercare, whether a single treatment, or a course of treatments. Except for the phenol peel, a course of treatments initially, and then regular maintenance treatment will achieve the best results over a longer period.

Post treatment

Superficial peels - you may be pink, this will settle within hours. Your skin may become a little dry and tight, but you may not be aware of any obvious peeling.

Medium depth peels - you may be pink, your skin will feel tight and dry, it may darken in patches prior to peeling, much like a sunburn peel. The peeling usually begins on day 3 or 4 and may last for 3 or 4 days.

Deep peels - the skin will darken, crust and peel and remains extremely red for about 3 weeks and longer for some individuals. Some people have extreme swelling, especially around the eye area. The skin will be raw whilst healing and a strict aftercare regime will be prescribed by your clinician. Most people will take 14 days off work. Complete healing may take several months.

Your clinician will provide you with appropriate skin preparation prior to peeling treatment

and advice on aftercare and treatment regimens/courses recommended for best results. Such advice will vary depending on the peel used.

Is it safe?

All treatments carry a degree of risk. All risks and complications will be discussed with you at consultation and prior to any treatment being agreed.



A variety of peels are available for general purchase on the internet. A great deal of knowledge is required in order to assess skin type, identify any contraindications (medical or medicines), diagnose the skin condition, prescribe the appropriate peel for the right skin, to prepare the skin appropriately and to ensure appropriate aftercare in order to minimise risk and ensure good results are achieved safely.

Side effects include, but are not limited to;

- ✓ Redness
- ✓ Tenderness
- ✓ Dryness
- ✓ Itching
- ✓ Peeling

All the above are expected to be temporary and settle spontaneously, usually within days.

- ✓ Altered pigmentation - darker pigment patches (usually temporary) - or loss of pigment which may be permanent.

Misuse of peels can cause permanent skin damage, increased and long-term sensitivity, altered pigmentation, infection and scarring.

Am I suitable for treatment?

Your practitioner will take a detailed medical history and an assessment of your skin type, needs and expectations to ensure this is an appropriate treatment for you, and to select the right peel for your skin type and expectations.

Treatment is not recommended if you are suffering from:

- ✓ Any skin infection in or near the treatment area or are unwell in any way (even a cold).
- ✓ If you have previously experienced allergic reactions to any ingredients in the peel solution.
- ✓ If you are taking any medications that may cause photosensitivity.
- ✓ If you are pregnant or breastfeeding.

- ✓ If you are currently or have recently completed a course of Roaccutane (acne treatment) in the last 6-18 months.

Chemical peels on the face can trigger the cold sore virus. If you are a sufferer, you must advise your clinician in advance of treatment. Vigorous exercise, sun exposure, sun beds, sauna should be avoided for 48 hours, or as advised by your clinician, after treatment. You must wear sunscreen as advised by your clinician.

If, having had treatment, you are at all concerned about symptoms you were not expecting or not happy with, please contact the practitioner for advice. If necessary, an appointment will be made for you to be seen.

Choosing your practitioner

Ensure you know the following information:

- ✓ The full name of the practitioner who is treating you
- ✓ Their qualification (doctor, dentist, registered nurse or other)
- ✓ Contact details (address, telephone and email)
- ✓ An emergency contact number for out of normal office hours

These are essential should you have a complaint or a problem or if you need to escalate it to any external authority.

Registered nurses, midwives, doctors, dentists and pharmacists are accountable to the standards of their statutory bodies, you can check their registration and they must hold indemnity insurance for the treatments and services they provide. Ensure other practitioners are registered with a professional body (such as the General Dental Council (GDC) or the Health and Care Professions Council (HCP)).

If you are unsure or don't have time to research yourself, Independent Voluntary Registers such as Save Face www.saveface.co.uk undertake a verification and inspection process of practitioners who wish to be included on their registers. These registers are themselves accountable to the Professional Standards Authority www.professionalstandards.org.uk.



Summary Checklist

What to expect

- ✓ To be seen by a doctor, nurse, dentist or prescribing pharmacist for your consultation and assessment
- ✓ To have enough time to consider all the information- avoid making hasty decisions
- ✓ To be treated by an ACE Group supported practitioner.
- ✓ A follow up appointment if necessary or desired

Ask questions

- ✓ What is this treatment/product?
- ✓ How does it work?
- ✓ What are the side effects/risks?
- ✓ What are the alternatives I might consider?
- ✓ What results can I expect?
- ✓ What will I look like immediately after?
- ✓ How long will the results last?
- ✓ How many treatments will I need and in what time frame?
- ✓ Are you able to treat complications, should they occur?
- ✓ What happens if I am not happy with the result?
- ✓ Is it painful? How do you minimise pain?
- ✓ What aftercare am I expected to perform?
- ✓ What will it cost and what are the payment terms?

What to check

- ✓ Check the qualifications of a Doctor (www.gmc-uk.org), Nurse or Midwife (www.nmc-uk.org), Dentist (www.gdc-uk.org), Pharmacist (www.pharmacyregulation.org), HCP Registered Practitioner (<http://www.hpc-uk.org/check-the-register/>) or non-dentist GDC Registered Practitioner (www.gdc-uk.org).
- ✓ Ask to see the unopened box of product/medicine to be used and make a note of it for future reference, should you later see another practitioner.

Be Safe

- ✓ Do not proceed with treatment if you do not feel comfortable with the practitioner.
- ✓ Do not proceed with treatment if you do not fully understand the information you are given.
- ✓ Take the necessary time to make your decisions.
- ✓ Ask the practitioner to show you the product in its unopened package prior to treatment.
- ✓ Make a note of the practitioner's name and product used for future reference.
- ✓ Ask for copies of before and after photographs for your reference.
- ✓ Do not have treatment in your home, at 'parties' or exhibitions or in environments that are clearly not clean or appropriate.