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06/25/06 Life - Seeing the light

ANGELIC INDULGENCE

Seeing the light

Once alternative treatment now used for curing all sorts of ailments

By Angela Braden

Light therapy may have once been thought of as a bunch of hooey, but lately it's been gaining more scientific ground and being used as a viable alternative to surgery and medication for common injuries, illnesses, and even diseases and skin problems.

As sci-fi as it sounds, doctors have been using therapeutic wavelengths of light throughout medical history. It wasn't until the advent of antibiotics that the use of light treatments diminished. (Now, the medical profession finds itself exhausting the resources of antibiotics because overuse causes strains of mutant bacteria. And the fact that antibiotics kill essential good bacteria along with the bad can sometimes cause long-term health problems as well.)

Light therapy may offer smarter alternatives for preventative health, natural healing and even beauty enhancement. Researchers at the Forsyth Institute in Boston are developing a wand-like device that kills only the harmful bacteria, using blue light. If successful, the device could be used to prevent or treat gum disease.



A client before she started her Lumiere sessions. CREDIT: Courtesy of Lumiere



Special wavelengths of light can rejuvenate the skin. This Lumiere client had the 12-session "repairing" package. CREDIT: Courtesy of Lumiere



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Both visible and infrared light have been shown to cause at least 24 different positive changes at a cellular level. Red light can be beneficial in treating problems close to the surface such as wounds, cuts and scars.

I tried out a light-based skin treatment called Lumiere, available in Atlanta at Solar Dimensions salons. After a 30-day program of 12 relaxing sessions, in which I basked under the LEDs (light emitting diodes) and imagined I was in Mexico, my skin honestly never looked better.

Little brown spots that had started to form on my skin were gone by the end of the program. After just the third session there were noticeable differences in my skin's texture and clarity.

Dr. Colin Whitehurst, chief scientific officer with PTL, a British company known for its pioneering work in light therapy, says Lumiere's skin-rejuvenating effects were discovered when they were treating patients for skin cancer.

Many of the people treated with this specific wavelength of red light were elderly, Whitehurst explains, and when the LEDs healed their skin it looked decades younger. Entrepreneurs like Ray Mead, president of Lumiere, took notice. He has now harnessed this same technology for skin rejuvenation and made it readily available at spas all over the country.

During the treatment, low-energy light waves act in a stimulatory manner, increasing energy to the cells, stimulating production of collagen and elastin and promoting DNA repair, cell regeneration and growth.

Another company leading the light-therapy revolution at dermatologists' offices and medi-spas is Aesthera, which manufactures PPx (photopneumatic therapy). PPx is a light-based therapy that rejuvenates the skin painlessly and with no downtime. PPx light even has a setting for pain-free hair removal.

Another light device found at many chiropractors' practices penetrates to a depth effective for bones, joints and deep-muscle rejuvenation. Strangely, it's called Cold Laser, though it's not a laser at all. "I've successfully treated carpal tunnel, arthritis and repetitive stress disorder, often helping patients avoid surgery and dangerous prescription drugs," says Dr. Regina Syed of the Pain and Injury Center in Alpharetta.

So for some treatments, we can be pain-free, drug-free and surgery-free, we just have to look to the light.

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Treatments for light therapy

Problem	Mainstream treatment	Light-therapy option

Sports injury	surgery, medication, steroids	Cold Laser
Arthritis	painkillers, surgery, steroids	Cold Laser
Tennis elbow	painkillers	Cold Laser
Carpal Tunnel	painkillers, surgery	Cold Laser
Aging skin	surgery, laser resurfacing	Lumiere, PPx
Brown spots on skin	laser resurfacing, bleaching creams	Lumiere, PPx

Light therapy in Atlanta

Solar Dimensions, www.solardimensions.com, has several Atlanta area locations. To find additional Lumiere providers visit www.pathwaytobeauty.com.

PPx is offered at Dr. Tom Lois office in Snellville, 770-979-1277, Dr. Judith Silverstein's Atlanta Center for Dermatologic Diseases, 404-252-4333, and at all Sedona Medspa locations, www.sedonamsa.com. For more information on PPx therapy visit www.aesthera.com

For Cold Laser providers visit www.microlightcorp.com. Dr. Regina Syed of the Pain and Injury Center in Alpharetta may be reached at 770-754-1000.