

City clinics on front line in battle against acne

‘Technology has advanced a lot and we can help people through new treatments’

By Peter Carlyle-Gordge
For the Free Press

It's long been the bane of a teenager's life – and often older people as well – but there's a lot more hope today that acne and its damage can be treated.

Dr. Earl Minuk says acne has basically been treated the same way for many years through antibiotics, diet change and the use of Accutane.

More recently, blue light and photodynamic therapy has also helped.

But many people are still left with acne scars and it can be severe and can certainly affect self esteem.

Dr. Minuk says he began treatments of acne with lasers around 1995.

“Prior to then, the usual treatment for scars was excision and dermabrasion, which wasn't too pleasant for the patient,” he says.

“Today, technology has advanced a lot and we can help people with acne scars through new treatments including carbon dioxide and fractional lasers, sculptra injections and other treatments.”

At his clinic, Dr. Minuk says the use of the latest fractional lasers has greatly improved his ability to treat acne scars.

“In four to six treatments you can see a noticeable improvement,” he says. “The technique treats about 15 to 20 per cent of the skin at a session and it helps tighten up the collagen and makes healing

much quicker.”

Results very encouraging

Dr. Minuk says some acne scars can also be treated with filler materials such as Sculptra. Such products are injected under a scar and they allow collagen to build up over the material and tighten up the skin.

“With some cases we use a blend of fractional laser work and Sculptra,” he says. “We've been combing these methods for the last six months and the results are very encouraging.

“It's very important though for a client to go to someone who is very experienced in this field and works with a variety of modalities.”

Dr. Minuk says he sees several clients a week with acne-related problems and about two thirds of them are women.

Besides diminishing the looks of scars, Dr. Minuk also works on modifying the colour of skin damaged by acne.

With deep, serious scars there is also an option of cutting them out, then suturing the area. Steroid injections can also be used to raise a scarred area of skin.

‘We do get clients who have active acne and it's important to treat that aggressively before you even consider treatment for scars,’ Dr. Minuk says. “We defer all

scar treatment until acne is under control.” Dr. Minuk says the jury is still out on the role many food stuffs play in acne.

“Some say chocolate is bad and others say coffee, but I advise people to not eat any product which they know leads to an acne flareup,” he says.

Another treatment for women is use of birth control pills, but Dr. Minuk says use of the pill, which affects hormone levels, can have many side effects and it should never be used without close consultation with a doctor.

“I never use it as a first line therapy and prefer the use of trusted antibiotics,” he says.

At the First Glance Aesthetic Clinic, dermatologist Dr. Victoria Taraska says acne can affect everyone from the young to people in their 80s and 90s. The highest rates are for teenagers and those in their early 20s.

Dr Taraska says the condition is produced by various factors, including bacteria and hormonal changes which affect the skin's oiliness. Her clinic uses many treatments including cleaning solutions, topical creams and antibiotics, accutane and even the birth control pill.

Summer brings relief

Blue light therapy is another option. “Most people see an improvement in acne in the summer months because of the

stronger sunlight. Blue light does the same but without the harmful ultraviolet rays,” she says.

“Light therapy done twice a week does help in mild to moderate acne cases. We can also use accelerated blue light therapy where we first treat the skin with a photosensitive product then use blue light for about 15 minutes. It enhances the light therapy.”

Dr. Taraska agrees chocolate and high carbohydrate diets have often been pinpointed as contributors to acne, but says dietary studies are conflicting and inconclusive.

“There is a lot of myth and ignorance around acne,” she says. “Some believe it can be spread through towels or touch but that is just not true. It is not a contagious problem.”

Dr Taraska's key advice to sufferers is not to pick at acne because that can cause deep scars. She says laser treatments can certainly soften such scars but will not totally eliminate them.

Serious scars can be treated with an injection of filler material or they can be cut out then stitched.

“About 50 per cent of adolescents get zits and it's important to treat them but not pick at them,” she says. “In the adult population, about 30 per cent of women have continuing acne problems and about 10 per cent of men.”