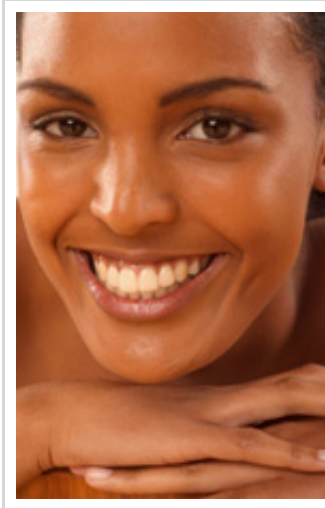


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## Shed some light on acne



Oxy-this and Benzoyl-that— if you've tried all those drugstore acne treatments but can't seem to keep the condition at bay, maybe it's time to see the light.

Whether it's gaining control of severe outbreaks or reducing scarring, light therapies are becoming increasingly popular for those who are serious about axing their acne. Using different wavelengths of light, these therapies address underlying causes of acne to help prevent future break-outs.

Depending on the severity of your acne and the results you're looking for, light therapies might be right for you.

### Bright ideas

There are two main types of light therapies for acne: blue light and intense pulsed light (IPL).

Blue light therapy, also called Blu-U, is a photo-facial technique that emits blue-coloured light on the skin. The light penetrates deep enough to reduce, and often eradicate, acne-causing bacteria without damaging the skin.

Often, a topical treatment called Levulan will be applied to make the skin more sensitive to the light thus making the treatment more effective

"For acne, it's the primary treatment we use," says Peter Vignjevic, assistant professor in Dermatology at McMaster University. "But it just treats acne, it does nothing for acne scarring."

If it's scars and acne you want to rid, IPL may be of more help.

IPL emits yellow, green and red light in a series of short pulses. The yellow and green light destroys the bacteria that lives in the skin and causes acne, while the red light directly targets overactive sebaceous glands (the ones that produce oil). The treatment helps relieve inflamed sebaceous glands and prevent production of excess oil.

"IPL works better for scarring. For treating just pimples, the two treatments are about the same,"

explains Vignjevic. "However, the blue light is much more convenient. You can be tanned when you're treated with blue light and you can use it on all skin types. You can't use IPL on anyone who has olive skin or darker."

## **Realistic results**

The face, back and chest are the most common areas people want treated with these light therapies. And while they often have good results, they come with a price.

Blue light therapy ranges from \$100 to \$200 per treatment. If you complement them with Levulan, it pushes the price per treatment up another \$200. Luckily, Levulan is often covered by private health plans. IPL is slightly more expensive, ringing in at \$300 to \$500 per treatment. And neither therapies are one-time-fix-all solutions, so be prepared to multiply those costs a few times.

Also, as with any cosmetic treatment, there is no guarantee that your face will become pimple or pock-free when you're finished.

"Anyone with mild to moderate acne can benefit from these therapies but it doesn't work as well for cystic acne," says Vignjevic. "Hopefully the treatments will put the acne into remission and get rid of it completely, but sometimes it just improves it. It's hard to predict."

No matter the treatment, sometimes you can't clear acne completely but only decrease its severity. "If acne is going to come back, it's going to come back," says Vignjevic. "Unless you can identify some underlying problem, there isn't much you can do to prevent it."