



Chang W. Lee/The New York Times

**'LIKE A TANNING BOOTH'** Pauline Muzyka receives a blue-light treatment for acne.

# Light or Heat Treatments As Alternatives to Drug

By LAUREL NAVERSEN GERAGHTY

**W**ITH new restrictions on prescribing Accutane and other forms of isotretinoin now in effect, light and heat treatments for pimples may become more popular, doctors say. Although they cannot banish severe acne completely, as the drug can, lasers and other lights can wipe out at least some blemishes, prevent many more and minimize scarring.

Most effective are high-intensity lasers, which heat, and thus shrink, the oil-producing glands in the skin. Lasers are not effective at treating blackheads. But "they work pretty well for the inflammatory type of acne, which is the papules and the pustules," said Dr. Roy G. Geronemus, a Manhattan dermatologist who is the president of the American Society for Laser Medicine and Surgery.

The Smoothbeam laser worked for Tonya Carter, 26, a sixth-grade teacher in Lugoff, S.C. After applying a numbing cream to her face, Ms. Carter's dermatologist would inch the laser across her skin, making targeted blasts. "It's like a little sting, like a little rubber band prick at you," Ms. Carter said.

Each treatment left her face covered with tiny red dots, which lasted less than a day. Even her first session brought noticeable improvement, and after six treatments, she said, her acne was "pretty much wiped out."

Dermatologists also zap pimples with intense pulsed light, which is less penetrating than a laser and works by reducing inflammation, and with Thermage, a radio-frequency-emitting device that heats the skin deep down. Thermage, which is more often used to reduce wrinkles or sagging skin, can disable overactive oil glands and also lessen the appearance of acne scars.

"It's kind of like a tanning booth on your face," said Pauline Muzyka, 30, a dental assistant in the Bronx whose recent twice-a-week blue-light treatments helped clear up her skin.

Another acne treatment, Levulan-PDT (for photodynamic therapy), involves using a laser or blue light after coating the face in a cream that makes the skin more light-sensitive. This helps the light destroy bacteria and disable overactive oil glands. But because the photosensitizing cream leaves the skin vulnerable to sunlight, patients must avoid the sun for a day or two after each treatment.

Levulan-PDT can also be used with low-intensity light emitting diodes — the same sort of beams found in remote controls — to treat acne by killing bacteria. For a minute or two the patient sits in front of a light source that is about the size of a computer monitor. A new type of

---

Doctors say limits on one  
remedy could make  
others more popular.

---

L.E.D. device appears to be effective even when used without Levulan-PDT, Dr. Geronemus said.

The prices of light treatments range widely, from \$250 to \$600 per session. Other acne remedies include some birth control pills, which lower testosterone, a hormone that helps make skin oily. Prescription antibiotic pills or creams can help kill bacteria. And chemical peels and retinoids like adapalene (brand name Differin) and tretinoin (Retin-A) help too, by preventing dead skin cells from clogging pores.

Over-the-counter treatments