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NEED A LIFT?

Can a new FDA-cleared skin-smoothing treatment *yield results that rival plastic surgery?* We asked the experts.

Despite notable advances in non- and minimally invasive treatments for fine lines and sun damage, sagging facial skin has proved challenging to treat without a scalpel. Sure, topicals can help improve the appearance of loose, crepey skin; microcurrent facials may provide a temporary lift; and collagen-boosting resurfacing lasers or energy-based treatments like Ultherapy can subtly firm a slack jawline. But to address significant creasing and slackening, most cosmetic doctors agree that a facelift is still the only option. Cytrellis's new Ellacor system is hoping to change that. Recently cleared by the FDA* to treat moderate to severe wrinkles in the mid-to-lower face, Ellacor is positioning itself as a viable, minimally invasive alternative to surgery.

How it works: Unlike microneedling, which uses tiny solid needles to superficially puncture the skin, eliciting a healing (collagen-boosting) response, Ellacor utilizes micro-coring, in which a proprietary device outfitted with hollow needles penetrates up to four millimeters into facial tissue and removes microscopic columns of skin. It took years of research for Cytrellis's founders, dermatologist Rox Anderson, MD, and plastic surgeon William Austen, MD, to determine the precise amount of skin to extract for skin smoothing—without scarring.

A single Ellacor treatment typically takes less than 45 minutes (including time for a topical anesthetic to take effect) and removes up to 8 percent of skin in the treatment area, an amount comparable to some surgical procedures. As those tiny channels heal and close up, the space between the columns realigns and subtly shrinks, smoothing the skin. Unlike surgery, this procedure yields quick results with minimal recovery time. Most patients say their skin (which may be pink and slightly swollen post-treatment) is healed enough to resume normal activities within three days, around the time some report seeing early results. Improvement may continue for several weeks.

Most patients will find multiple sessions, spaced about a month apart, yield the best results. During clinical trials, "we saw a benefit after the first treatment, but patients who had two or three did even better," says Manhattan dermatologist Roy Geronemus, MD, a researcher on the Ellacor trials. After three sessions, a patient may have had as much as 15 percent (or more) of excess skin removed in the mid-to-lower face.

So what does the skin look like post-treatment? Andrea Jones, a 60-year-old bookkeeper in Nashville, says she researched getting a facelift at 50, but decided against it because of the considerable post-op healing time. When she was invited to try Ellacor during its FDA clinical trials, she jumped at the chance.

After her first session, Jones says she saw some subtle changes two days later. After the second and third sessions, she says, "I really noticed my skin seemed smoother, and I saw a noticeable reduction in the lines around my mouth and jowls."

Jones's experience was similar to the patient results Geronemus saw. Most had some wrinkle reduction and jawline smoothing—but nothing that rivaled a facelift, even with the removal of all that extra skin. Why? Likely because a facelift does more than pull slack skin taut; it also tightens the facial muscular system under the skin to create a dramatic lift.

Bottom line: Ellacor may not yield facelift-like results, but it's low risk, high reward. "Ellacor accomplishes a lot without the wounding typically required with other technologies [like lasers or surgery]," Geronemus says. "Previously, patients had to take off a week or more to recover. Now they can achieve [significant smoothing], with minimal downtime."—**MARGAUX ANBOUBA**

**Ellacor is currently FDA-cleared to be used on skin types 1 through 4 on the Fitzpatrick Scale (very fair to olive skin). Because the mechanical manipulation of darker skin (Fitzpatrick skin types 5 and 6) can cause hyperpigmentation, a separate clinical trial is needed to evaluate proper protocols for using the technology on those skin types.*

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