

Glycolic Acid Peels

Krauss Dermatology, Wellesley, MA

1. What will glycolic acid peels do for my skin?

These mild chemical peels improve the texture and normalize the color of the skin through exfoliation, with excellent results in many skin conditions. Age spots, dark patches (melasma), and discoloration from acne are greatly improved. Fine lines are smoothed. Sallow tones and lifeless texture are replaced by a healthy glow. Breakouts and clogged pores are reduced, even in patients with difficult to treat acne.

2. How is the peel performed?

After cleansing, we apply a mild glycolic solution (alpha-hydroxy acid derived from sugar cane). Cool air from a fan will counteract the mild burning or stinging that may occur during this several minute period. You will be monitored carefully during the entire process, and a neutralizing spray will be used to stop the treatment. A protective moisturizer is then applied. The entire process takes only 10 minutes.

3. How many peels will I need?

Because glycolic peels are superficial, and thus safer than other types of chemical peels, improvement is gradual. While a single peel will firm and freshen the skin, leaving a healthy glow, most patients should plan on a series of 5-6 peels to achieve their long-term goals. The treatments can be performed at 3 to 4 week intervals, gradually using higher strengths as the skin builds tolerance. Results are generally long lasting, although some patients may find an occasional peel every 3 to 6 months helps to maintain beneficial effects. Unfortunately, glycolic peels are not covered by insurance.

4. Do I need to use any special products?

Daily use of glycolic acid products is recommended to prepare the skin for the procedure and maintain results. We recommend the use of an 8-20% glycolic acid cream for at least 2 weeks prior to the first peel. The glycolic cream, and Retin A/Renova creams if used, must be stopped 2 days prior to each peel. At all times, SPF 30 or greater sunscreen (preferably containing titanium dioxide or zinc oxide) should be worn outdoors to maintain improvement, and avoid sunburn and discoloration.

5. What are the risks?

Most people respond to a glycolic peel with only mild redness lasting several days. Adverse reactions such as peeling, scabbing, infection, recurrence of cold sores, and sensitivity to wind and sun are uncommon but possible. Rarely, areas of persistent darkening or lightening of the skin may occur, but this risk can be minimized by careful sun protection after the peel. We do not perform glycolic peels on patients who have used the acne medicine Accutane during the prior 6 months.

Patient Instructions for Glycolic Acid Peels

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Pre-Peel

1. Avoid using self-tanners, masks, scrubs or exfoliating agents for at least 48 hours prior to the peel.
2. Stop alpha-hydroxy acid (glycolic cream), retinol, Retin A, Renova, Tazorac or Differin products 48 hours before peel.
3. Do not wax facial hair for 48 hours before peel.
4. Notify us if you have cold sores, fever blisters or a herpes outbreak anywhere on the face prior to your appointment.
5. Avoid sun exposure and tanning for at least a week prior to your peel.

Post-Peel

1. Avoid exercise and sweating (e.g. sauna) for a few hours after the procedure.
2. You may use makeup immediately, but apply very gently without traumatizing the skin. Do not use scrubs or rub your face with a wash cloth when removing makeup.
3. Use sunscreen of SPF 30 or greater (preferably containing titanium dioxide or zinc oxide) during the week following the peel. Strictly avoid tanning, which can cause dark stains in the treated skin.
4. Do not use alpha-hydroxy acid, retinol, Retin A, Renova, or Differin until 48 hours after your peel, or until all redness has resolved. During this time, use a fragrance free moisturizer (e.g. M.D. Forte replenish hydrating cream or Cetaphil lotion) once or twice a day.
5. Do not wax or use bleach or depilatory creams for at least a week after the peel.