

Proper wound care is the single most important factor in your recovery. Following these instructions carefully will minimize your risk of infection, hyperpigmentation, and scarring — and get you the best possible result. Text us a photo at 775-525-1712 on days 5–7 so we can monitor your healing remotely.

1. What to Expect — Normal Healing

The healing process after fractional CO₂ laser resurfacing typically progresses through predictable phases. Knowing what is normal will help you stay calm and give us a call only when something truly concerns you.

Phase	What You Will Experience
Day of — Day 1	Hot sunburn sensation (lasts 3–5 hours); redness; moderate swelling around eyes and cheeks. Skin will feel tight.
Days 1–4	Swelling peaks at 24–48 hours. Skin appears “bronzed” or darkened. Oozing and serous fluid production is normal. Keep skin covered with ointment at all times.
Days 4–7	Peeling and flaking begins. Skin will look crusty. Do not pick — allow skin to shed naturally. Grid marks from the laser are normal and will fade.
Days 7–10	Most peeling complete. Skin transitions to pink. Begin sunscreen once skin is no longer raw.
Weeks 2–6	Pink/red color gradually fades. The longer pinkness persists, the more collagen remodeling is occurring — this is a good sign.
Months 1–3	Collagen production peaks. Skin continues to improve in texture, tone, and tightness.

2. Day-by-Day Wound Care

PROCEDURE DAY

- **Cool compresses:** Apply cool compresses (frozen peas in a bag, cold wet gauze) as soon as you arrive home. Continue for the first 3–5 hours. Do not apply ice directly to skin.
- **Ointment:** Apply Recovery Ointment or Aquaphor liberally to all treated areas. Keep skin covered at all times — do not let it dry out.
- **Elevation:** Sleep with head elevated on 2–3 pillows or in a recliner. Place an old towel or t-shirt over your pillow to protect bedding from ointment.
- **Pain:** Take Tylenol (acetaminophen) for discomfort. Avoid aspirin and ibuprofen.

DAYS 1–4 — Vinegar Soaks + Ointment Phase

Vinegar soaks are the most important part of early wound care. They prevent crust buildup, reduce bacteria, and soothe the skin.

How to do vinegar soaks:

- Mix 1 tablespoon of white distilled vinegar per 1 cup of cool water. Store in the refrigerator.
- Soak clean gauze pads in the mixture, gently ring out, and apply to treated area for 15–20 minutes.
- Repeat 3 times daily during Days 1–4. After each soak, pat dry with a clean soft towel.
- Immediately reapply a generous layer of Recovery Ointment or Aquaphor after every soak.
- Discontinue soaks once all oozing and crusting has resolved (typically day 3–4).

Cleansing and showering:

- Cleanse face 2–3 times daily with a gentle cleanser (Cetaphil or baby shampoo) or let lukewarm shower water stream over treated area — do not scrub.
- Avoid hot water, steam rooms, and getting shampoo on treated areas.
- Pat dry gently — never rub.

⚠ Do NOT pick, rub, or forcibly remove any crusting or peeling skin. Premature removal significantly increases the risk of scarring.

DAY 3 — Add Hydrocortisone Cream

- Begin 1% hydrocortisone cream (OTC) twice daily to reduce redness and inflammation. Continue until pink color is gone or for up to 10 days.

DAY 5 ONWARD — Transition to Moisturizer + Sunscreen

- Text us a photo at 775-525-1712 so we can check your healing progress before you transition products.
- **Cleanser:** Continue gentle cleanser (Cetaphil or something similar) twice daily.
- **Moisturizer:** Switch from Aquaphor to gentle moisturizer. Do a test spot first to check for sensitivity.
- **Sunscreen:** Begin SPF 30+ mineral sunscreen (zinc oxide or titanium dioxide) once skin is no longer raw or oozing. Apply every morning and reapply if going outdoors.

DAYS 10+ — Resuming Normal Skin Care

- Makeup may be resumed once skin is fully healed and no longer raw — typically 7–10 days. Use mineral powder makeup; avoid liquid foundation until fully healed.
- Begin skin-brightening products (brightening pads or hydroquinone cream) to control post-inflammatory hyperpigmentation (PIH).
- Avoid exfoliating cleansers, retinol, glycolic acid, and active ingredients for 4 weeks after your procedure.

3. Activity Restrictions

Activity	Restriction
Sun exposure	Avoid entirely for first 2 weeks. After that, wear SPF 30+ and a wide-brimmed hat. Sun is the #1 cause of post-laser hyperpigmentation.
Exercise / strenuous activity	Avoid for 5–7 days. Sweating delays healing and increases infection risk.
Swimming / hot tubs / saunas	Avoid until fully healed — typically 2 weeks.
Bending over / heavy lifting	Avoid for first 2 weeks — raises blood pressure to the face.
Alcohol	Avoid for at least 48 hours post-procedure; longer is better.
Makeup	Begin mineral powder makeup on day 7–10 once healed. No liquid foundation until cleared.
Skin care actives (retinol, acids)	Avoid for 4 weeks post-procedure.
Picking / scratching	Never. This is the most common cause of scarring.
Facial expressions	Minimize extreme expressions while skin is tight and healing.
Hair products / sprays	Keep away from treated areas until fully healed.

4. Medications After Your Procedure

- **Antiviral (Valtrex/Acyclovir):** Continue the full prescribed course. Do not stop early even if you feel fine.
- **Antibiotic (Cephalexin):** Continue the full prescribed course. Call us if you develop side effects.
- **Pain:** Tylenol (acetaminophen) as needed. Avoid aspirin and ibuprofen.
- **Itching:** OTC Benadryl (25 mg) at bedtime if itching is bothersome. Cool compresses also help. If itching is severe or worsening, call our office.
- **Hydrocortisone 1% cream:** Begin day 3, twice daily, until pink color resolves or up to 10 days.

5. Signs of Complications — When to Call Us

Most patients heal without any problems. However, contact us immediately if you notice any of the following:

Sign	What It May Indicate
Worsening pain after day 2–3	Possible infection or herpes reactivation
Fever	Infection
Yellow/green or malodorous discharge	Bacterial infection
Spreading redness or blistering	Infection or adverse reaction
Unusual clustered blisters or sores	Herpes simplex reactivation — needs immediate antiviral treatment
Localized bright red or purple patch	Early scarring — early treatment is critical
Persistent itching beyond week 3	Contact dermatitis or infection

⚠ **CALL US IMMEDIATELY at 775-525-1712 if you have any of the above signs.**
⚠ **After hours or on weekends, go to the ER and call our emergency line.**

6. Preventing Post-Inflammatory Hyperpigmentation (PIH)

PIH is the most common complication after CO₂ laser resurfacing and is almost entirely preventable with strict sun avoidance and proper skin care.

- **Sun:** Avoid all sun exposure for 2 weeks. After that, use SPF 30+ mineral sunscreen daily without exception — even on cloudy days and through car windows.
- **Hat:** Wear a wide-brimmed hat any time you are outdoors for the first 4–6 weeks.
- **Skin brighteners:** Restart brightening pads or prescribed hydroquinone at day 10–14 as directed. These help prevent and reverse PIH.
- **Hydration:** Drink 100+ oz of water per day. Hydrated skin heals better and is more resistant to PIH.
- If you notice darkening of any treated area beginning around weeks 3–4, contact us immediately — early treatment clears PIH much more effectively.

7. Follow-Up & Remote Check-Ins

Follow-up is important after CO₂ laser resurfacing. Your expected schedule is:

- 1 week – f/u (in-person or photo/phone appointment)
- 1-3 months

Text us a photo of your skin 5–7 days after the procedure at 775-525-1712 so we can monitor your healing progress remotely.

Text us a photo at 775-525-1712 on days 5–7. Include the treated area in good natural lighting. This allows us to monitor your healing remotely and reach out if anything needs attention.

Questions at any point in your recovery? Call or text us at 775-525-1712. We are always happy to help — whether it is a quick reassurance or something that needs to be seen. Your recovery matters to us and we are with you every step of the way.

Acknowledgment

I have read and understand these postoperative instructions and agree to follow them. I understand that failure to comply may compromise my safety, results, and recovery.

Patient Signature

Date

Patient Printed Name

Witness / Staff Signature