

DERMABRASION

MAKING SCARRED SKIN SMOOTHER

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If you have a piece of wood that is rough or has gouges in it and you want to make it smooth, what do you do with it? You sand it.

Wouldn't it be great if you could smooth skin that is disfigured by scars, pits and irregularities? You can. The process is called "Dermabrasion."

Facial scarring

Various problems cause facial scarring and blemishes. Anything that causes a break in the skin, such as a cut or infection from chicken pox will cause scars. Probably the greatest cause of multiple scars and pits in facial skin is old scarring from acne. Other facial skin irregularities occur from birthmarks and areas of excess pigmentation.

How is it done?

Dermabrasion uses a rotating abrasive instrument, similar in principle to a rotating sander that is used to sand wooden furniture. The surgeon carefully sands off a very thin amount of skin at a time until the desired skin depth is achieved. Thus the top surface of the skin is removed, but the deeper portion of the skin is left undisturbed.

Why does it work?

The irregularity being treated must be in the top layer of the skin. If it is, then the irregularity is removed when the top layer of the skin is removed. The great thing about sanding skin (rather than wood) is that after the procedure is completed, the deep layer of the skin keeps growing, and a new top layer is produced. The idea is that the new layer produced will match the surrounding skin.

How effective is it?

Dermabrasion isn't perfect. First of all, the irregularity being treated must be in the top layer of the skin. Some areas of the face, such as the nose and cheeks, are more amenable to treatment than others (the eyelids are too thin to dermabrade). Wide, shallow scars tend to respond better than those that are narrow and deep. People with dark skin may develop changes in the pigmentation of the skin. But most of the time the procedure is an excellent method of minimizing facial scarring from disfigurement due to

old acne or other blemishes. Occasionally the procedure is repeated to further smooth an area that has been partially improved.

Is it painful?

No. Dermabrasion can be performed as an office procedure after injection of numbing medication. When large areas (such as the entire face) are treated all at once, general anesthesia is usually used. The first couple of days after surgery the face is usually red and swollen and a straw-colored fluid oozes from the skin. Within a week to ten days the new skin surface has generally grown in. The discomfort is generally minimal. The new skin comes in pink, and it takes about 6 months to gradually fade back to normal coloration. Makeup can be applied after a couple of weeks; this effectively camouflages the temporary color change. Direct sunlight should be avoided for about 6 months in order to prevent blotchy pigmentation changes.

Can tattoos be dermabraded?

Yes. But the effectiveness of the dermabrasion depends upon how deep the skin has been tattooed. If the pigment from the tattoo is just under the surface, dermabrasion will probably be very effective. If it is very deep, then dermabrasion will probably not be able to remove the pigments placed in the deep layers of the skin. Sometimes skin will become "tattooed" by foreign material accidentally placed in the skin (such as dirt or asphalt from an accident in which a person's skin is scraped on a roadway). In cases like this, dermabrasion may do a terrific job of cleaning the skin and making it look "like new."