

Sunday Mail (QLD)
Edition K - Sunday Mail Magazine SUN 01 OCT 2006, Page 002
THE light TOUCH
By JOANNA HALL

COVER STORY

SKIN SINS ARE BANISHED WITH A NEW BEAUTY TREATMENT. BY JOANNA HALL.

I'm lying on a table with a space age looking red lamp just a few centimetres from my face. It's incredibly bright, even with goggles over my eyes. As I relax into the light I feel as if I am lying on a beach in the South Pacific, not an anti-ageing clinic in Sydney.

Twenty minutes later, I'm a bit disappointed when the light goes off. But apparently I'm a "responder"; my cheeks are warm and slightly pink, and my skin feels smoother and tighter.

Back home an hour later, I can really see a difference. My skin is glowing and my smile lines have all but disappeared. Even my husband notices a change, without knowing what I've done, and comments that I don't look as tired as I did earlier.

The cause of my transformation is a non-surgical skin rejuvenation treatment called **Omnilux** Revive. The lamp harnesses the power of safe light rays, called photodynamic therapy (PDT). Unlike laser and ultraviolet light, these rays cause no damage whatsoever. In fact, they stimulate skin cells, using the body's natural processes to counteract the effects of ageing.

The promise is that, after just 20 minutes under its rays, the signs of ageing, including wrinkles, fine lines and puffiness, are reduced. I could see a definite improvement, but what surprised me more was learning that the lamp is an accidental byproduct of a pioneering treatment for non-melanoma skin cancers.

Back in the late 1980s, British scientist, Dr Colin Whitehurst, developed a lamp using PDT technology. "I wanted to have a source of light with the properties of a laser, but one which was cheaper than a laser," he explains.

"Then I started researching alternative ways to treat skin cancer at the Christie Hospital in Manchester. I thought the lamp could work and save money, so we started treating patients." The lamp is part of a two-pronged attack on cancer. A light-sensitive cream or paste is applied to the cancer lesion and is absorbed by it. Then the lamp, which has to be tuned to a specific wavelength, kills the cancer cells, but without harming the normal cells surrounding them.

"This allows the body to regenerate healthy tissue to fill the gap that was once occupied by the tumour," explains Dr Whitehurst. "There's no scarring and no ulceration. You'd never know the cancer had been there in the first place." In the process of treating patients with the lamp, scientists discovered the skin cancers weren't the only thing improving; the skin surrounding the lesions was improving as well.

"We realised that the light was 'splashing' over a bigger area than the site of the cancer and rejuvenating it, even though this area was being treated by the light alone," says Dr Whitehurst.

In 1998, PhotoTherapeutics was established to explore other possible applications of the lamp.

The first one launched was **Omnilux** PDT.

Dr Liz Griffin, a Sydney cosmetic physician, uses the lamp to treat non-melanoma skin cancers.

"It's a good way too treat basal cell carcinomas and superficial squamous cell carcinomas, especially on the face," she says.

"Also, older women tend to get them on the bottoms of their legs where the skin is thin, so you don't have to cut them open and have them go through six to eight weeks of healing time." A superficial basal cell carcinoma can disappear in one or two treatments. Depending on the regime, one treatment may cost between \$300 and \$500.

Next, **Omnilux** Revive was launched for skin treatments. Dianne Shields, from Sydney's Baby Boomers Anti-Ageing Clinic, says, "You get the most amazing results. People don't believe it can work that well, in just 20 minutes. But I ask them to try it and when they do, they're convinced." Clients include men and women who want to repair or prevent skin damage. A course of 10 treatments and three peels is recommended for mature skin, followed by a peel and lamp treatment every month.

The cost is around \$1000.

Omnilux Blue, the third lamp launched, treats acne, and then came **Omnilux** Plus, which can be used for skin rejuvenation and wound healing.

Dr Fabian Baez, a Sydney-based cosmetic physician, says of the Omnilux Blue, "It's a non-invasive way to kill the bacteria that causes acne, without any side effects." Depending on the severity of the acne, an average course could involve 10 treatments, plus light chemical peels, over a period of two or three weeks.

The package usually costs around \$1000.

"The studies show a tremendous improvement in the acne without using any other treatments," says Dr Baez.

"So when we combine it with other treatments such as a skincare regime, diet and chemical peels, we get an even more impressive result." Dr Whitehurst, now the director of research and development at PhotoTherapeutics, believes there's a huge potential for PDT.

"We keep on getting reports about lamps being used to treat one condition, and then coincidentally improving another one," he explains.

"We know we can treat conditions on the outside of the body, in the skin, but I think we can look towards treating deeper wounds. The possibilities are endless."

For more information on **Omnilux**, or to find a salon or clinic offering this treatment, call True Solutions International on 1800 808 993.

* **Omnilux** is not covered by Medicare.

THE LAMPS EXPLAINED

* **Omnilux** Revive - can be used for skin rejuvenation, or combined with Blue to treat acne, or combined with Plus for wound healing.

* **Omnilux** Blue - using the same platform as Revive, this is used for the treatment of acne and actinic keratoses (dry, scaly, rough-textured patches or lesions that form on the outermost layer of the skin after years of exposure to sunlight).

* **Omnilux** Plus - using the same platform as Revive and Blue, this can be used for skin rejuvenation and wound healing.

* **Omnilux** PDT - used specifically for the treatment of non-melanoma skin cancers.

Caption: On page 1 A woman, Picture: Austral; On this page A womans face; On page 3 Graph showing THE LAMPS EXPLAINED.

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