



# Ray of LIGHT

Want a skin treatment more intensive than a facial but without the pain? Eugenie Kelly discovers the beauty of illumination.

When the tear-stained face of 26-year-old Melbourne woman Clare Oliver appeared on our television screens last September, few were unaffected. Here was an incredibly courageous woman dying from melanoma, using her final days to campaign for tougher controls in the solarium industry. Add to that the well-known fact that every year in Australia more than 380,000 of us are treated for skin cancers, and it's no surprise the majority of us equate light exposure with danger.

That's probably why it takes a moment or two to get your head around the fact that light-based treatments can actually remedy the effects of all that sun damage you've accumulated in your life. Er, come again?

Since 2003, a technology called Omnilux has been used in Australian spas and salons where users lie on a bed for up to 20 minutes, their face fronting a panel that emits a low-intensity light-emitting diode (LED). Called Omnilux, it contains no UVA or UVB rays and differs to other light-source treatments such as intense pulsed light (IPL) and laser, which depend on the use of heat to set off the process of skin rejuvenation.

A quick biology lesson on how skin rejuvenation works: the whole aim of "rejuvenation" is to stimulate your collagen fibres, the most important building block of the dermis. Wound healing is a series of events that starts with inflammation, proceeds to regeneration, then moves to remodelling or maturation. The result is plumper tissue, an improvement in skin tone and texture, plus wrinkle reduction.

"By using LED energy on normal skin, we can induce an inflammatory response that's very mild," says Dr Glen Calderhead, one of the original founders of Omnilux. "There's no signs of redness, pain or itching. But the inflammatory cells start to work and the skin believes it has been wounded, yet in actual fact it hasn't. It then cries out 'Heal me!' to the rest of the body, so the natural healing process kicks into action."

The machine has three different heads that produce different coloured lights (the result of varying wavelengths), with each one designed to treat specific skin conditions. The Revive head's red light is used for anti-ageing and rejuvenating purposes. The Plus head — a deeper infra-red wavelength — is used for skin rejuvenation (and wound healing when combined with Revive). Blue, meanwhile, is used for the treatment of acne.

The light is brighter than anything you've probably ever experienced but a therapist places pads over your eyes and it only takes a minute or two to adjust. It's the moment that the light is turned off that you need to have your wits about you. First you literally see stars, then feel like you're immersed in inky darkness as your retinas adjust to the room's normal light.

It all sounds intense but in fact Omnilux is relaxing (throughout a few of the sessions, I dozed off). It's also known to boost immunity: during one treatment I was suffering a bout of tonsillitis. I pepped up 24 hours later. Psychosomatic? Well, since NASA developed the technology for its space medicine program back in 1998, different wavelengths have been used to treat everything from seasonal depression and eczema to migraines and nerve damage.

Omnilux caters for the kind of person who wants more intensive results than a facial but not the down-time of more hardcore treatments. Generally a course of 10, 20-minute sessions are recommended, but don't expect immediate results. "By the end of the third week, the client sees plumping of skin, removal of fine lines and wrinkles," says Calderhead. "By the fourth week it's more noticeable: cells have been activated by light [it's the cell's energy centre that helps stimulate collagen production] which they build upon. Twelve weeks later results peak."

One of the most exciting beauty announcements of 2008 was with the news that Australia's Therapeutic Goods Administration had approved the sale of miniature hand-held light-emitting diodes over the counter, meaning you'll no longer need to visit a beauty therapist or dermatologist to get your light fix. Major players such as L'Oréal and Procter & Gamble are looking into producing their own versions, while Omnilux is already on the case.

"It means you can get your full salon treatment then take home the hand-held device," enthuses Calderhead. "Obviously these are much smaller than the salon version but they're capable of the same intensity as their big brothers. They're designed for top-ups on small areas like your nasolabial folds or crow's feet."

These handheld devices are available in two types — new-U for wrinkles and clear-U for acne — and retail for \$690 each.

Now, who said takeaway was bad for you?

To find out more about Omnilux, phone 1800 808 993.

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