

## **Intense Pulsed Light (IPL)**

### **What is IPL?**

Intense Pulsed Light (IPL) is a light-based treatment that delivers broad-spectrum pulses of light to the skin. Unlike lasers, which use a single wavelength of light, IPL uses multiple wavelengths, making it versatile for targeting different skin concerns. IPL is commonly used for pigmentation problems, redness, thread veins, and overall skin rejuvenation. It is not technically a laser, but is sometimes referred to as a 'laser-like' treatment.

### **Why might I choose to have this procedure?**

You may consider IPL if you want to improve uneven pigmentation, sun spots, redness, rosacea, thread veins, or overall skin tone. It is also used for hair reduction in some cases. IPL is popular as it can improve multiple concerns with minimal downtime and is suitable for people looking for gradual, natural improvement.

### **What does the procedure involve?**

Before treatment, you will have a consultation to review your medical history, skin type, and goals. You may be asked to avoid sun exposure, self-tan, and certain skincare products (such as retinoids) for 2–4 weeks beforehand. During treatment, protective eyewear is worn and a cooling gel is applied to the skin. The IPL handpiece is placed against the skin and pulses of light are delivered. You may feel a hot flick or elastic band snap sensation. Sessions usually take 20–45 minutes depending on the size of the area. After treatment the skin may appear red or slightly swollen, like sunburn.

### **What are the benefits of the procedure?**

IPL can improve sun spots, freckles, redness, broken blood vessels, rosacea, and uneven skin tone. It can also stimulate collagen, improving overall skin texture. Many people notice brighter, clearer, and more even-looking skin after a course of treatments. Downtime is usually minimal compared with some other laser procedures such as resurfacing.

### **What are the risks and potential side effects?**

Mild redness and swelling for a few hours are common. Pigmented spots may darken and crust before fading over 1–2 weeks. Less common risks include blistering, temporary or permanent pigment change, scarring, or infection. IPL is not suitable for all skin types, particularly darker skin tones, due to the risk of hyperpigmentation. Eye protection is essential during treatment to prevent injury.

### **What alternatives are available?**

Alternatives include laser treatments (such as vascular lasers or pigment-specific lasers), chemical peels, topical creams (e.g. prescription creams for pigmentation), or no treatment. Your dermatologist will help decide which approach is best suited to your needs.

### **What should I expect after the procedure?**

Immediately after IPL, your skin may look pink and feel warm, similar to sunburn. This usually settles within a few hours. Pigmented areas may darken and flake over several days. Makeup can normally be applied the next day. Sun protection is essential after treatment to protect results and reduce risks. Improvement is usually gradual over a course of sessions.

### **How many treatments will I need?**

Most people need a course of several treatments spaced 3–6 weeks apart for best results. Maintenance sessions may be recommended every 6–12 months depending on your skin concern.

### **Who should not have this procedure?**

IPL should not be performed on recently tanned skin, or in people who cannot avoid sun exposure afterwards. It is not suitable during pregnancy or breastfeeding. People with active infections, cold sores, or certain skin conditions in the treatment area should avoid treatment. IPL is also not appropriate for very dark skin types. A consultation will ensure your suitability and minimise risks.

### **Who can perform this procedure?**

IPL should only be carried out by trained healthcare professionals such as consultant dermatologists or other practitioners with accredited training, working within a regulated clinic. Appropriate knowledge of skin types, light physics, and safety protocols is essential for safe treatment.

### **Will I need a consultation?**

Yes. A face-to-face consultation is essential before treatment to assess your goals, skin type, and medical history. A test patch is usually performed to check your skin's response before proceeding with a full session.

### **Where can I get more information?**

You can find more information from:

- The British Cosmetic Dermatology Group (BCDG)
- The British Medical Laser Association
- The Joint Council for Cosmetic Practitioners (JCCP)

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