

# Nd:Yag laser treatment and aftercare

This leaflet aims to answer your questions about having Nd:Yag laser treatment and what you need to do after you have had treatment. It explains the benefits and risks, as well as what you can expect when you come to hospital.

If you have any further questions, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.

## What is Nd:Yag laser treatment?

This is a laser treatment that is used for removing dark marks in the skin such as birth marks or tattoos. It takes place in the dermatological surgery and laser unit (DSLU), which is located on the third floor of Block C in the South Wing of St Thomas' hospital.

Varying wavelengths can be used for treatment, and your doctor will choose the most appropriate one for you based on your skin condition. Long wavelength is used for deep pigment problems, for example tattoos, and short wave length is used for superficial pigment problems, for example dark birth marks

## What happens during treatment?

- Anaesthetic cream will be applied to your skin by nursing staff one hour before your treatment. **It is therefore important that you arrive one hour before your treatment time.**
- Please let the doctor know if you have any allergies to any medicines.
- You will be asked to lie on a treatment couch and expose the area to be treated. Gowns may be provided if necessary.
- Hair may be shaved off any hairy areas that are to be treated.
- Eye protection is provided – either goggles to wear or an eye guard which is inserted under the eyelid.
- The laser is applied to the affected area. Quick flashes of bright light may be seen during treatment.
- A cold air machine may be used to increase your comfort.
- A dressing and Vaseline will be applied after treatment.
- Each treatment session usually lasts 30 minutes.

## What are the benefits of having Nd:Yag laser treatment?

The Nd:Yag laser is able to produce significant lightening of dark birth marks or tattoos over a number of treatments with little risk of changing the skin's texture or scarring of the skin.

## **What are the risks?**

- If the long wavelength is used for deep pigment problems, immediate reddening occurs at the treatment sites and fades over 24-48 hours.
- If the short wavelength is used for superficial pigment problems, the treated area may be bruised for 10-14 days. Crusting and/or slight bleeding may occur.
- There may be swelling of the treated skin for two to three days. Skin around the eyes is particularly prone to swelling, which may lead to partial closure of the eye.
- There is always the possibility of unwanted changes in skin colour after the treatment, either slightly darker or lighter.
- Your skin will be sensitive to the sun's rays after treatment and we would recommend wearing sun protection cream (factor 30) directly after treatments and for up to a year after.
- Sometimes a scab may form on the treated area. If a scab forms, it is important not to pick it. Picking a scab may leave a scar and may lead to an infection.
- There is a slight risk of infection, but this is very rare. Infection is most likely to happen if scabs form in the treated areas.
- Damage to the eye will occur if eye protection is not used. This will always be provided.
- It is the unit policy not to provide laser treatment during pregnancy, therefore please let us know if you are pregnant or are planning a pregnancy.

## **How can I prepare for Nd:Yag Laser treatment?**

There is no specific preparation for Nd:Yag laser but some patients like to book some annual leave from work after having the treatment, as bruising may be present.

## **Will I feel any pain?**

An anaesthetic cream is applied to the treatment area one hour before your treatment time. This greatly reduces any discomfort during treatment, but does not completely numb the area. We have a cooling fan available, which can reduce the discomfort further. There can be a slight stinging sensation during treatment but this quickly fades once the treatment has finished.

Standard painkillers such as paracetamol can be purchased from your local pharmacy, if you feel you need these after your treatment. Please follow the instructions on the packet. Avoid taking any medicines containing aspirin for pain relief for five days after the laser treatment, as it increases the risk of bruising. If however you are prescribed aspirin by your doctor, please continue with this as normal.

## **What happens after laser Nd:Yag treatment?**

Bruising usually occurs at the treatment site and may worsen over 48 hours before fading after a week. Immediately after the treatment, the laser operator will show you the treated area and will usually apply Vaseline and a basic dressing to cover the treated area. You will be able to return home as soon as the treatment is complete. If an eye patch has been applied as a dressing we strongly advise that you do not drive home, but take public transport instead and have someone to accompany you.

## **What do I need to do after I go home?**

- There may be swelling of treated skin for a few days. Skin around the eyes is particularly prone to swelling which may lead to partial closure of the eye for a few days after treatment. To help reduce swelling, apply an ice pack for two to three minutes every quarter of an hour

on the day of treatment and use extra pillows under your head when sleeping to help reduce swelling from areas treated on the face.

- You can shower and bathe the treated area as normal but you should pat the skin dry. Try to avoid shaving in and around the lesion until any bruising has faded.
- Use a greasy moisturiser (such as Vaseline) on the treated area at least twice daily, as it is often soothing and stops scabbing and crusting occurring.
- Use an antiseptic cream (for example Savlon®) on the treated area if crusting occurs, to reduce the risk of infection. Continue to moisturise in between applications of the antiseptic cream.
- If we have treated around the eye and used an eye shield and anaesthetic eye drops, an eye pad or sunglasses can be worn for a few hours following the treatment, for your comfort. You will also be supplied with an antibiotic eye ointment which you should apply around the eye twice a day for three days after treatment. Please let the doctor know if you have any allergies to any medicines.
- Avoid using any makeup on the lesion for five days after the treatment, as applying or removing it may damage the skin, which is very fragile during this time.
- Avoid sports involving physical contact, until any bruising has faded.
- Generally you can resume normal activities straight away, but some of our patients like to book annual leave, whilst the bruising is fading or arrange treatments for school holidays.

## Will I have a follow-up appointment?

Not everyone will need a follow up appointment, but if it is necessary, you will be given a date before you leave.

Successive treatments are usually six weeks apart to allow your skin to recover.

### Contact us

**For clinical problems only**, please contact 020 7188 6284 and leave a message. The answer phone is checked several times a day and someone will contact you as soon as possible. Please leave your name and telephone number.

**For appointment queries only** please contact our reception on 020 7188 6407.

**In an emergency** please contact your GP or local accident & emergency (A&E) department.

### Pharmacy medicines helpline

For information about any medicines that you have been prescribed at Guy's and St Thomas' hospitals, you can speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

**t:** 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

**Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)** – To make comments or raise concerns about the Trust's services, please contact PALS. Ask a member of staff to direct you to the PALS office or:

**t:** 020 7188 8801 at St Thomas' **t:** 020 7188 8803 at Guy's **e:** [pals@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@gstt.nhs.uk)

**Knowledge & Information Centre (KIC)** – For more information about health conditions, support groups and local services, or to search the internet and send emails, please visit the KIC on the Ground Floor, North Wing, St Thomas' Hospital.

**t:** 020 7188 3416

**Language support services** – If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch using the following contact details.

**t:** 020 7188 8815 **fax:** 020 7188 5953

**NHS Direct** – Offers health information and advice from specially trained nurses over the phone 24 hours a day.

**t:** 0845 4647 **w:** [www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk)

**NHS Choices** – Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health.

**w:** [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

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