

What is chemical peeling?

Chemical peeling means literally "peeling the skin surface by the action of a chemical substance applied". Imagine an onion fresh out of soil. If you peel off the dirty brown skin, the smooth and white surface appears. Peeling a human skin is something like that, only it is a little more difficult.

Which peeling agents are there?

At present, the main peeling agents are phenol, trichloroacetic acid (TCA) and glycolic acid. While they are all called "chemical peeling", procedures with different peeling agents vary greatly in nature. When phenol is used, thick crusts are formed, and deep peeling is achieved after sloughing. With TCA, the hardened brown surface comes off to cause medium-depth peeling. In our clinic we use glycolic acid, which causes flaking and mild peeling, and serves as an agent for superficial peels. The deeper a chemical peel, the more dramatic the obtained effect may be, but at the same time that such complications as skin discoloration and scar formation are far more frequent after deep peels. In our clinic we maximize the effect and minimize the danger by combining whole-face glycolic acid peels with partial deep peeling by means of the laser with precise depth control.

Is chemical peeling new?

Chemical peeling has a long history. In fact it goes far back to Cleopatra, who is said to have bathed in sour milk. Sour milk contains lactic acid, a peeling agent.

The first medical applications were described, however, only at the end of the nineteenth century by a German dermatologist, Unna. He designed Unna's paste, a resorcin-based face mask, which is now obsolete. After that, phenol made its debut. The technique of deep peeling with phenol, was established in the 1960's by the American plastic surgeons Baker and Gordon.

Chemical peeling was further developed mainly in the United States. In the 70's and 80's, chemical peeling with TCA was very popular. In the early 90's, glycolic acid peels for improving and rejuvenating skin appearance were commercialized on an enormous scale. In Tokyo Skin Clinic, keeping pace with progress in the States, we have been practicing glycolic acid peels by the method of our own since 1992.

What is glycolic acid?

Glycolic acid belongs to the same family as the lactic acid in Cleopatra's favorite bath milk. They are so-called fruity acids, found in fruits such as apples, and other foods. Large amounts of glycolic acid are contained in sugar cane. It is also present in a small amount in human skin, so that it is "natural" in the true sense of the word. Fruity acids are officially called "alpha hydroxy acids" (AHA), and they share part of their chemical structure and some important properties.

How does glycolic acid work?

Among many fruity acids, glycolic acid is known to have a most profound effect on the skin. It has a number of ways of action.

It peels the old skin layer, the keratin, and promotes the regeneration of the skin surface, improving its structure.

It increases important components of the skin, like collagen and elastic fibers, thus thickening and reinforcing the skin. It also makes blood vessels stronger.

It reduces melanin (brown pigment) and lightens the skin.

It minimizes pores by removing the sebum (skin oil) stored in them.



before



3 months later after 3 peels



one year after start of treatment

What is glycolic acid good for?

Glycolic acid restructures the skin, improving its overall appearance and color and rejuvenating it. Glycolic acid is especially effective for acne and acne scars, fine lines, brown spots and discolorations, sallow and flaccid skin, and oily skin with enlarged pores.

Acne resistant to conventional therapy is often successfully treated by removing existing pimples with a glycolic acid peel.

What kind of treatment is a glycolic acid peel?

After you wash your face, the doctor removes the sebum from the skin surface by wiping it off with acetone, familiar as nail polish remover. Glycolic acid is then applied and left on the skin for the planned length of time. The time of application is usually 5 minutes for the first session and made progressively longer for the following sessions. After that, the acid is diluted with abundant water and removed. Finally, you wash your face again, and that's the end of the procedure.

Stinging is what you're supposed to feel during the peel. It's quite bearable and different from pain. Rather, pain is a sign of deeper peeling than intended. Let the doctor know immediately if stinging intensifies to the degree of pain. By removing the peeling solution, it will go down quickly and undesired deep peeling can be minimized.

What will happen after a glycolic acid peel?

Immediately after the peel, your skin looks red and white at the same time. On the same day, you may wash your face, but you should not apply anything on your skin. That means you'll have to go home with no make-up on.

From the next day, your skin will be dry, flaky or peeling for three to five days. Generally, the appearance of your skin won't affect your social life. If you cover your skin with make-up, it'll be even less noticeable, though the make-up won't go on well.

No special care is necessary after the peel, but rigorous UV protection with a sunscreen with an SPF 30 or higher is mandatory for at least two weeks.



What are the risks of glycolic acid peels?

Glycolic acid promotes peeling by loosening the cohesion between the cells of the skin surface. They are quite different from the deeper peels that cause the damaged cells to form extensive crusts. They are therefore safer and free from complications of permanent nature like scar formation. In addition, it makes use of the pharmacological actions of glycolic acid so that the effect of the peeling is much greater than can be expected from their depth.

Transient adverse reactions are as follows: Redness may persist for several days. Scabs may be very noticeable, and even after sloughing, redness and dark discolorations can remain for a while where the skin has been peeled too deeply. Sun exposure without protection will readily lead to a sunburn or dark discoloration. Rarely, a herpes simplex infection (cold sore) breaks out shortly after a peel and may spread when treatment is not started immediately.

Peel while you work!

Glycolic acid peels are safe and simple. You can even have one on your way home from work. It is, however, important to make an individually tailored treatment program in order to get good effect with little risk. Treatment programs include the number and frequency of peeling procedures, home care with glycolic acid for external use (G lotion), and possible combinations with other medications and treatment modalities. Facial treatment with glycolic acid generally begins with three peels at one- to two-week intervals followed by home care.

What are the costs of glycolic acid treatment?

A facial peel costs from ¥ 31,500 per session. You will be charged a consultation or follow-up fee for every visit. A bottle of G-lotion is ¥ 5,250.

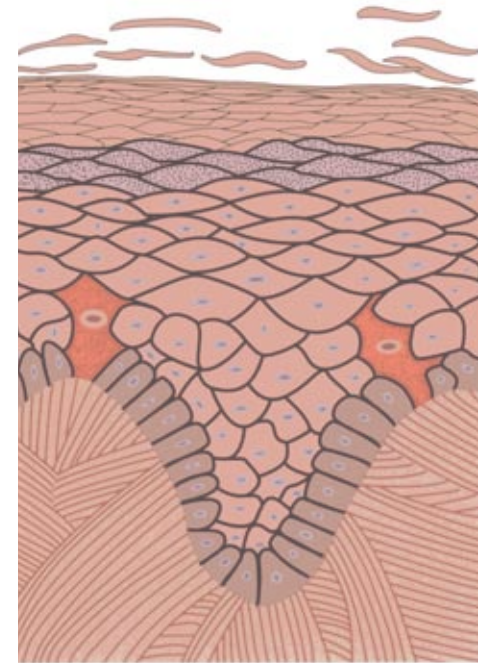


*glycolic acid lotion
for home care*

Back in 1992, we were the first clinic to introduce chemical peels with glycolic acid into standard practice in Japan. Dr. Yuri Okabe, the medical director of Tokyo Skin Clinic, has given numerous academic presentations, lectures and seminars as authority on chemical peels. She wrote on this subject in "Aesthetic Dermatology Practice", a textbook on aesthetic dermatology published in 1999. A manual of glycolic acid peels for physicians by this author, came out in the same year. The contents of the above pamphlet is based on the lecture for the public given by Dr. René du Cloo of our clinic at the conference of the Japanese Society for Aesthetic Surgery held in May 1998.

CHEMICAL PEELING

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tokyo skin clinic