

# Skin SOS

By Theresa O'Rourke

**H**ow appropriate that the bikini was named after a 1940s atomic bomb site: The mention of the word sends women running for cover. The good news? Baring all is decidedly more bearable in 2004—thanks to several new products and atomic-age in-office treatments.

## SUN SPOTS

To correct sun damage that has already appeared as dark patches on the chest, serums containing ascorbic acid, kojic acid, or fruit acid (such as Lancôme Absolue Anti-Age Spot Serum) can lighten pigment and make the skin tone more uniform. For sensitive skin, New York City dermatologist Roy Geronemus prescribes EpiQuin, a hydroquinone and retinol cream that releases antioxidants into the skin gradually, lessening the chance of irritation. Studies have shown that it visibly reduces dark spots in four weeks. If the damage is more severe and diffuse (and money is no object), Washington, D.C., dermatologic surgeon Tina Alster recommends photodynamic therapy, a light treatment that costs about \$1,000 a session. "It used to take five or more treatments to see results, but now there is a topical solution called Kerastick that heightens the efficacy of the treatment," Alster explains. "I apply it about an hour before treating the skin and can lighten larger spans of dark spots on the chest and neck in roughly two sessions."

## DRY SKIN

Think of dry skin like a hangover—a rough but self-inflicted condition. To prevent itchy, flaky skin, keep showers to less than 15 minutes and use a two-in-one, soap-free body wash and moisturizer, such as Clinique Water Therapy Body Moisture Wash or Olay Moisture Rinse. After bathing, when skin is still damp, slather on a moisturizer, such as Curel Daily Moisture Therapy Lotion Ultra Healing. For particularly parched areas, like the elbows and knees, Livingston, New Jersey, derma-

tologist Cheryl Citron advises using an over-the-counter 12 percent lactic acid cream, such as AmLactin, or asking your doctor to prescribe a prescription lactic acid or 40 percent urea cream. They break down the intercellular bonds that cause thick, flaky skin, rather than coating it.

## STRETCH MARKS

Like an overachieving coworker who sends emails at 11 P.M., skin likes to leave evidence of how hard it works—in the form of stretch marks. The only cream that can reduce them is prescription-strength Retin-A, which removes redness so that stretch marks appear to blend into the skin.

You can also beam away older stretch marks (which tend to fade to white) with an Excimer laser, to stimulate pigment production, Alster says. "The problem is, without maintenance, the pigment fades over a few months." Your doctor bills, however, might not—the treatment costs between \$300 and \$1,000, depending on the number of marks.

## BACNE

"If you can't see it, then it doesn't exist" seems to be the delusion many women have about acne on the back. Citron recommends an antibacterial cleanser, like Neutrogena Fresh Body Herbal Wash, or a prescription acne wash with benzoyl peroxide or sulfur. Then use a topical benzoyl peroxide, such as prescription Triaz, which also includes glycolic acid to exfoliate dead skin and zinc lactate to reduce irritation and redness. "Apply it before you go to bed—and sleep in an old T-shirt, because it bleaches colored fabrics," Citron says.

When the acne is severe, more and more dermatologists are now reaching for their lasers, which can wipe out stubborn breakouts in as little as two to three visits, separated by one to two months. The Smoothbeam laser can treat deep acne and smooth out scars; the Vbeam, a pulsed-dye laser, works well on redness; and photodynamic therapy is best and most cost-effective for treating larger areas of inflammation, Alster says. Each session costs \$500 to \$1,000.

