

# Scarred For Life By Laser Hair Removal!

## THE LOOK REPORT

As the government considers relaxing the rules on the training that salons need to perform laser surgery, we examine the risks...

After years of waxing her underarms, Faustina Aidoo, 31, wanted a permanent solution – so when she saw a local independent beauty clinic

offering laser hair removal, she went in. “The salon gave me a patch test, which seemed fine,” she remembers. “The 30-minute treatment was uncomfortable, like somebody holding a match against my skin, but after the first session, the hair was already

growing back finer, so I decided to carry on with the full course of six treatments.”

But after the third session, Faustina noticed something was wrong. “It wasn’t painful, but I spotted white patches under my arms. The therapist assured me the colour would come back, yet after the fourth session, there were more patches and my skin had blistered and scabbed. I was

### ‘My skin had blistered – I was horrified’

horrified. I stopped wearing vest tops and tried not to lift my arms. I had no idea this could happen.”

Sadly, Faustina’s story is common. She’s just one of a growing number of women experiencing side effects – scars, burns and permanent changes to their skin’s pigment – at the hands of inexperienced therapists. Laser therapy is one of the fastest-growing beauty trends in the UK – one in five of all cosmetic surgery procedures now involves lasers – the problem is, you don’t need to be a medical professional to operate them, and there’s no recognised qualification.

### Burns

Salons across the UK have started offering laser treatments for everything from acne through to spider veins or body hair. “People are often looking for a short cut to medical problems,” warns

surgeon Dr Newman, who specialises in treating women whose laser treatment has gone wrong. “The truth is, there are no quick fixes and some people who carry out laser treatments aren’t qualified medical professionals.”

At the moment, by law, anyone using 3b or 4 lasers – the type normally used for cosmetic procedures – must be registered with the Healthcare Commission, but at present the only training they need is that given by the manufacturers. “This means many practitioners go on quick courses with the manufacturers – they don’t necessarily have a medical background,” warns Dr Sean Lanigan, Medical Director for skin experts Sk:n clinics. Even

more worryingly, the government is now considering proposals to relax this rule, which might mean anyone can operate a laser without even having to be registered.

### Inexperienced

Dr Newman says as it’s such a new area of surgery, there aren’t many statistics available on just how many women suffer at the hands of ‘laser cowboys’. However, over 70 per cent of the patients he sees at his clinic are there as a result of failed laser surgery. “If a therapist is inexperienced, they often increase the intensity of the laser to try to get a more dramatic result,” he explains. “This can lead to the skin literally burning.”

Meanwhile, other people can waste hundreds of pounds on ineffective treatments. “While some people’s skin is damaged, others complain the lasers have no effect at all,” says Ron Myers,

spokesman for surgery website [www.theconsultingroom.com](http://www.theconsultingroom.com). “This is because some therapists don’t know what they’re doing, so they use less powerful machines. As a result, people spend money on wasted sessions.”

### Safety

There is some good news. In the right hands, laser treatments can be very effective. “Although the results are never guaranteed, done correctly, laser therapy is one of the best ways to get rid of body hair, and it can also help reduce acne and veins,” says Dr Lanigan. “To be safe, check you’re being treated by a medical professional.”

After noticing the changes to her skin, Faustina contacted the clinic, who pointed out the consent form she’d signed mentioned possible pigment changes in the small print – so all she could do was hope the colour would eventually return. “But after over a year, it never has,” she says. “I’ve had to learn to live with it and still avoid sleeveless tops. I regret having the treatment now – I’m just thankful I only had it on my underarms, and not my face.”

### YOUR LASER CHECK LIST

Before you undergo any cosmetic laser treatment, make sure you can tick all these boxes:

- Is the clinic registered with the Healthcare Commission ([www.healthcarecommission.org.uk](http://www.healthcarecommission.org.uk))?
  - Is your laser being used by a registered doctor or nurse?
  - Have the risks been explained?
  - Have you thoroughly read the forms you’ve been asked to sign?
  - Have you had a patch test?
- Make sure the intensity of the laser is never increased beyond the strength used for this.



Sinem has been scarred by the lasers

## ‘I’ll Never Wear A Bikini Again!’

Sinem Morgan, 27, from London, was burnt by her treatment...

I’ve always hated shaving and loved the idea of being permanently hair-free. I found an independent laser hair removal clinic online, which looked very professional. The first treatment was absolutely fine – the therapist used the laser at 40 per cent strength. But when I returned for the second time, they’d upgraded the machines and were turning the laser up to 60 per cent. My skin felt

uncomfortably hot. The practitioner stopped and tried cooling my skin using wet towels, but it wasn’t working. When I got home, I took off my jeans and was horrified. I was covered in red, swollen burns in strips. I rang the clinic who said it would calm down, but the pain continued for a week. I was able to wear clothes, but it hurt so much I had to keep applying cooling gel and taking painkillers.

I went to see my GP, who referred me to a plastic surgeon. He said my burns wouldn’t subside for up to nine months. Even then, I’d be scarred for at least five years, if not permanently. The clinic apologised and offered me a refund. I later discovered the only training they’d had was given to them by the laser manufacturers, but this isn’t illegal. I wanted to be hair-free, not scarred.”



Faustina has been left with discoloured underarm patches