

THE FACTS ON FACIALS

You may believe that salon facials are a complete waste of time and money, but consider Martine McCutcheon and Kylie Minogue's immaculate complexions and the seemingly ageless skin of Kim Basinger. Their secret? They all rely on regular facials to keep their skin in tip top condition.

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

For those of you who have never had a salon facial before, here's what to expect.

Each facial should start with a skin assessment so the therapist can choose the right products for your skin type. Most facials consist of a five- or six-step pampering programme that includes a cleanse, exfoliation, steam, mask, massage and moisturise of the face, neck and upper chest.

It can also include extraction – a polite way of describing what is essentially a professional spot-squeezing session. This can be uncomfortable, but is much more effective than a DIY job, which can leave your skin red and even scarred. A really good therapist can not only unplug blackheads but will also pierce whiteheads with a sterile needle and gently eliminate those as well. Traditional extraction is done with fingertips and tissues, but the most modern facials use machines to do the job.

Power peels will lightly blast the skin with fine crystals, then suck them back up again to gently resurface the skin and unplug pores – known in the trade as microdermabrasion. This type of facial is not hands-on or particularly pleasant, but it can show instant results. In the right hands these machines can exfoliate dead skin cells, deep-cleanse the skin of daily grime and boost the blood flow to give your skin an all-over workout. Trained therapists can also use the machine to diminish scar tissue over a longer period of time.

DO THEY WORK?

The answer to this question depends on what you expect from a facial in the first place. Traditional hands-on facials are unbeatable for relaxation and pampering and they *do* get your skin deep-down clean, which is great if you live in a polluted city. Dermatologists also say they can supply a surge of much-needed moisture to dehydrated skin that will leave your face looking healthy and the skin "plump" for a few days.

But can they get rid of wrinkles and fine lines? The jury is still out on that one. Dermatologists say "no" and facialists say, done regularly, "yes". Anything that speeds the turnover of cells in your skin will help it to look more radiant, feel smoother and diminish blemishes, while boosting blood and lymph flow will temporarily soften fine lines and help get rid of puffiness around the eyes.

When it comes to problem skins prone to breakouts, facials can be a great help. Some facialists claim to open and close pores, which is a myth. That said, pores will look smaller after they have been cleaned, and to do this your skin might be steamed which warms the pores to make extraction easier. But a word of warning for anyone with acne, Rosacea or visible facial capillaries. "I would not recommend steaming if the face is badly broken out or if there is acne with redness," says Dr Ellen Gendler, a clinical associate professor of dermatology at New York University. "It can aggravate the condition because steaming can stimulate blood vessels and sebaceous glands."

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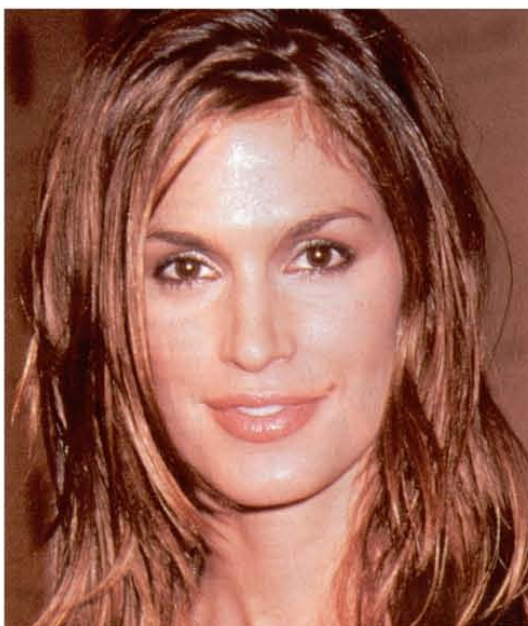
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Karin Herzog Pore Draw Facial

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● *Karin Herzog facial fans* – Kylie Minogue, Kim Basinger, Jennifer Aniston, Demi Moore, Sharon Stone and Linda Evangelista