

"Do You See Anything Different?"

Thermage is being touted as a quick, painless facelift. Does it work? Is it really pain-free? Here's one woman's experience.

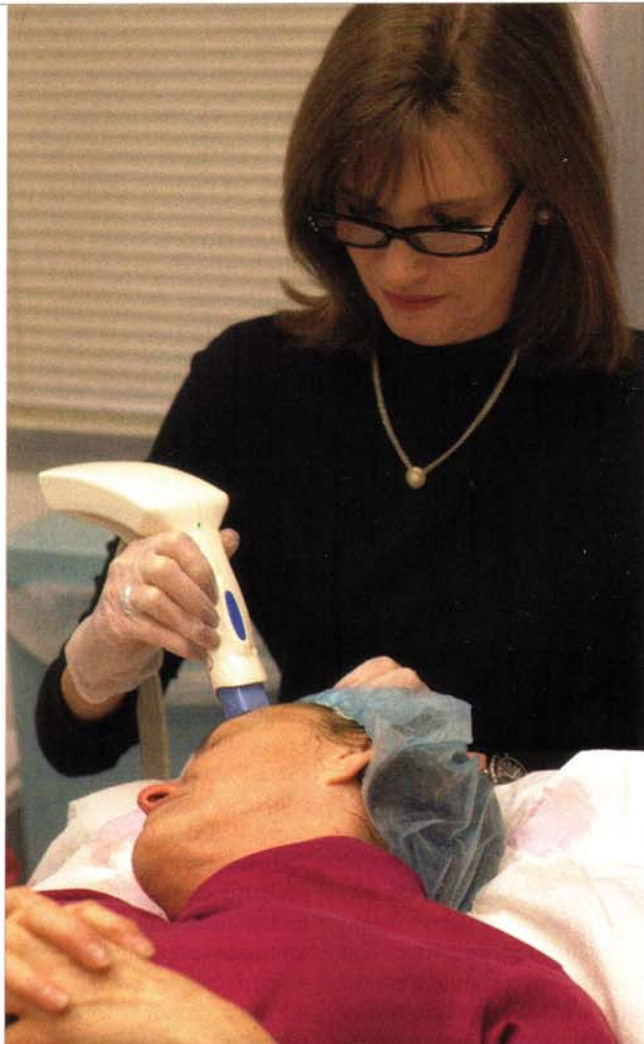
MY DECISION TO have a "little work" done wasn't an easy one. It began on a routine visit to the dermatologist.

I'd picked up a pamphlet with a gracefully aged woman on the cover. She looked like the type who had eaten nothing but whole grains, faithfully practiced yoga, and avoided suntans her whole life. Turns out she'd just had Thermage, a new facelift that doesn't require a scalpel, a big bank account, or a place to hide for weeks of healing.

I stretched back the skin on my face and looked in the mirror. The old me! Or rather, the young me. I don't spend much time on mirrors or makeup. I've been able to stay somewhere in my twenties mentally and physically—I exercise a lot. When I did own up to 46 years, people seemed surprised—in a good way.

Shouldn't a few lines and a little sagging be expected, even honored, at my age? But in the harsh light of that exam room, I let go of the skin and took a hard look at my middle-age self.

The pamphlet's promises were enticing: Lift sagging jowls and chins with a quick, painless, one-time procedure. Better still, it



Dr. Marilyn Berzin performs Thermage, a treatment that promises to lift sagging skin with few side effects and no downtime.

has no immediately noticeable effects; they occur gradually over about six months. No one would be the wiser.

That stealth element was the kicker for me. A tomboy as a child, a hippie as a teen, and a feminist in college, I've disdained traditional views of feminine beauty. I couldn't possibly turn out to be a facelifter.

Then there was the \$2,000 price tag. It's a lot cheaper than a surgical facelift. But spending that much on vanity made me hesitate.

I spent the next few weeks dealing with all those qualms. It wasn't a *real* facelift, I reasoned. Thermage was less drastic: Radio frequencies work like microwaves to bake the tissues

under skin, which shrink up as they heal, tightening and smoothing the skin.

Side effects are virtually nil—maybe a little temporary redness and swelling. Risks can include divots caused by high-intensity zapping, but those are rare, and my doctor, Marilyn Berzin of DC, had been using Thermage for four years. She said the biggest risk was disappointment from excessive expectations. I wanted to get rid of a little sagging, not deep creases—those are a job for resurfacing peels and lasers. I also had enough flesh to work with. Thermage doesn't work well on thin skin or skinny faces.

I decided I could finance it by writing a magazine article—anonously of

course. My editor was the only one I told about my plan. My doctor says most of her patients keep their Thermage so secret that not even their spouses know.

The Big Day

When I arrived for my Thermage treatment, the physician's assistant took some "before" shots—we'd do an "after" in about three months—and offered me a painkiller. Huh? The pamphlet had promised "painless." I remembered my editor saying someone had told her that Thermage hurt a lot, so I asked the doctor about it. She rolled her eyes as she recalled the patient. "He was a guy!" she said as we shared a laugh—and I downed the Percocet.

The doctor covered my cheeks, jaw, and chin with grid marks to guide the wand and began zapping. Yeow! That guy was right—it was not painless. The device has a cooling mechanism to protect surface skin, but I could feel burning down deep, especially over my jaw and cheekbones. I didn't complain, though I'd read that the doctor is supposed to "monitor the patient's pain level" to make sure the zapper is not turned up too high. I figured no pain, no gain, and I didn't want her to turn it down too much. It was payback for that little laugh.

After an hour, I emerged a little dizzy—probably from hyperventilating as I was trying to yoga-breathe for relaxation—but I felt fine and looked just a little pink. I felt even better when I looked in the mirror and could see some tightening, especially under the chin.

Would anyone else?

The Results

I wanted to see if others would notice without being asked. But within days I'd blabbed my secret to several

friends—who mostly said I looked “better”—and to my older sister. “I want one!” she wailed, as if we were five years old and fighting over a doll. Her reaction didn’t surprise me, but then she passed the news on to my brother, a 50-year-old guy’s guy. His response? “I want one too!”

My brother did not succumb (as far as I know), but my sister did. She’s very happy with the results.

And me? It was hard to tell whether I was seeing “continued improvement” as promised because the results are so subtle and gradual. As months passed, I did notice my face looked firmer, my cheeks less fleshy. Friends I hadn’t told needed to be prompted with: “Do you see anything different about me?” Most did, though they usually said they thought I’d lost weight or that I looked rested.

I worried all that money had been for naught until I went to the Department of Motor Vehicles for a new driver’s license—and the photo looked good. I compared it with a year-old photo and could see improvement.

So I am glad I did Thermage, especially if it means not only that I look a bit younger but that the aging

process has been stalled a year or two. Now what should I do about those worry lines I sprouted from all my soul-searching and secrecy?

How John McCain Could Become the Next President
 Secrets of Staying Married | Better Vision Without Tears

WASHINGTONIAN

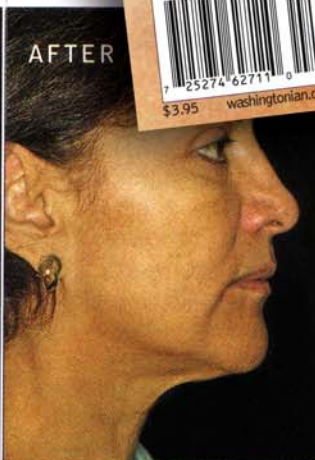
Look GOOD

- Tips for Great Makeovers
- Spas We Love
- Beauty Products That Really Work
- How to Dress Ten Pounds Lighter
- Top Plastic Surgeons and Dermatologists
- Beautiful Skin at Any Age

Feel GOOD

FEEL GOOD

Photographs courtesy Dr. Flor Mayoral/Thermage



BEFORE **AFTER**

Thermage sends heat under the skin without damaging the surface. The underlying tissues shrink as they heal, tightening and smoothing skin. This woman is shown before Thermage and one month after the procedure.



... Retinol Correxion
 Deep Wrinkle Night Cream
 and Neutrogena Healthy
 Skin Anti-Wrinkle Inten-
 sive Serum with retinol.

If you're a woman who is nursing, pregnant, or considering becoming pregnant, some physicians advise against using retinoid or retinol products.

In Your Thirties

Past age 30, skin can get drier and duller. The first signs of aging—fine lines and uneven texture—appear because of slower cell turnover.

In Your Forties

This is when it's smart to add a firming and anti-wrinkle treatment. Lines become more visible as collagen and elastin fibers