

# TREATMENT FOR SUN DAMAGED LIPS

## PATIENT INFORMATION

Ablative laser is an appropriate treatment for moderately to severely sun-damaged lips. Laser enables accurate destruction of the abnormal surface layers of the lip. Correction of these precancerous changes in the surface layers of the lip may prevent the development of a lip cancer at a later stage. A biopsy of the lip will be necessary to confirm the diagnosis and that there is no cancer present prior to laser treatment.

### THE PROCEDURE:

Your lip will be photographed before and after laser treatment. Local anaesthetic is injected into the gums and lip to completely numb the lower lip. It is important for the eyes to be protected from the laser beam and they will be covered prior to starting treatment. The treatment itself is short. The laser makes a "popping" noise. During the treatment a smoke evacuator is used to remove fumes – this makes a noise rather like a vacuum cleaner.

### POSTOPERATIVE COURSE:

The treated area of your lip will look red and will ooze small amounts of blood immediately postoperatively. A thin layer of Bactroban antibiotic ointment is applied. After the anaesthetic wears off (about 1 to 2 hours) your lip will feel swollen and painful. You are likely to need some painkillers for the first day and night (e.g. Panadol, Panamax, Panadeine Forte).

Your lip will develop a crust over the treated area. This should be gently removed with saline and Vaseline or paw paw ointment should be applied every 2 hours during the first 3-5 days. Bactroban ointment or Vaseline (petroleum jelly) should continue to be applied 5-6 times daily. If the lip dries out, more frequent application of the ointment may be used. It is usually most difficult to keep the lip clean during the first week, thereafter it becomes much easier.

It will take 2-3 weeks for your lip to heal. The lip heals at the corners of the mouth while the centre heals last.

After the lip has healed it is very important that you should regularly apply a lip sunscreen (e.g. Hamilton's, Q-V or zinc) at least 2 - 3 times a day all year round. This should help prevent any recurrence of your problems.

### COMPLICATIONS:

The most common problem is the return of your sun-damaged changes. This happens early on in about 5% and at a later stage in about 5-10%.

An uncommon complication is the development of scarring, either within the red portion of the lips or along the junction with the surrounding skin. This can be helped with the early injection of cortisone preparations. Scarring is most likely at the site of a biopsy or any previous treatment. Infection is an uncommon problem. If you have had lip cold sores, please let me know before the laser surgery and I will arrange for you to take anti-viral medication before the procedure.

If you have any questions or problems during the course of your treatment please call:

Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm call: Adelaide Skin & Eye Centre 8211 0000 or After Hours 0403 535 126