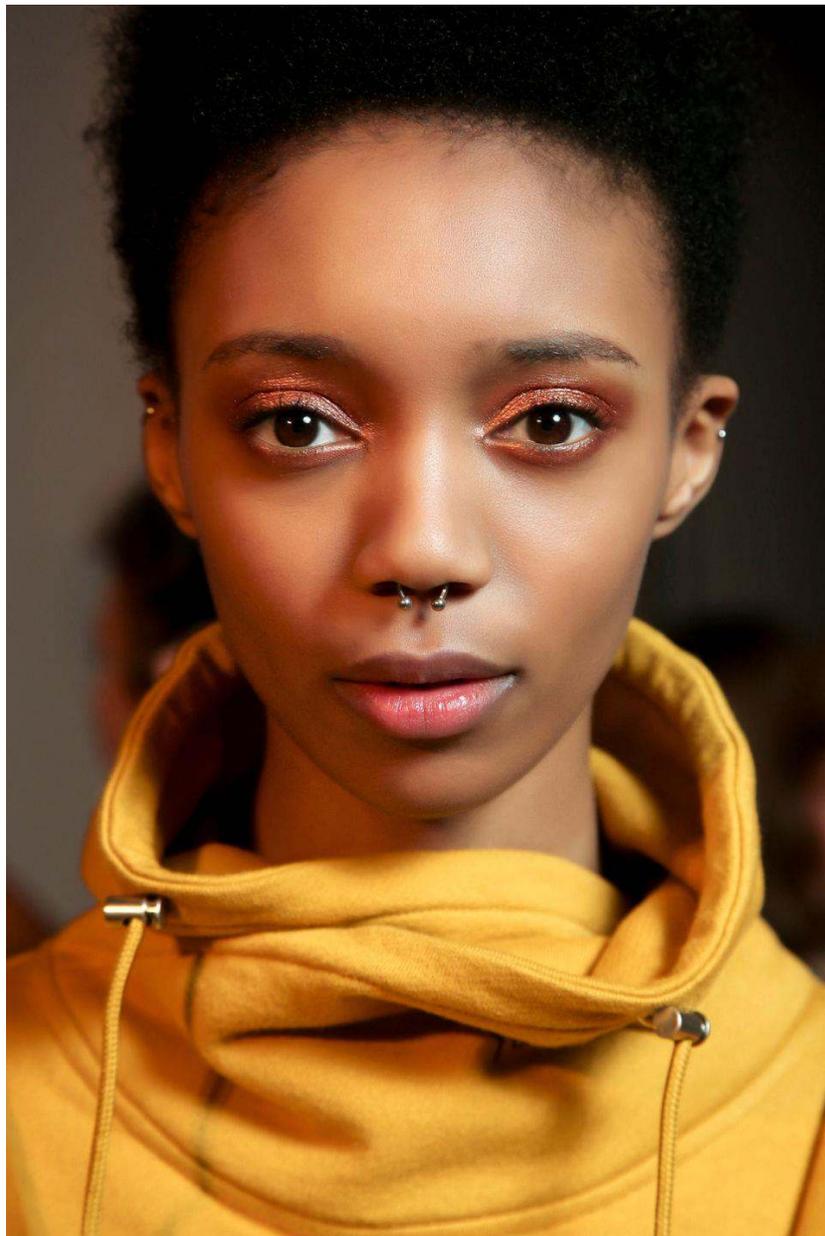


FASHIONISTA

HEY, QUICK QUESTION: ARE SKIN-CARE MEMBERSHIPS THE NEW GYM MEMBERSHIPS?

Monthly fees for laser treatments are now rivaling fancy-pants gyms.

LINDSEY UNTERBERGER • MAR 26, 2018



Welcome to our column, "Hey, Quick Question," where we investigate seemingly random happenings in the fashion and beauty industries. Enjoy!

Ask any dermatologist — or beauty editor, for that matter — and they'll tell you that getting great skin takes patience, upkeep and consistency. "Think of it like working out," we've said to countless friends disappointed by a one-time facial treatment. "You're not going to shape up in a single sweat session. You have to go religiously to see results."

When you apply such a philosophy, it's easy to understand why the gym-membership model is trending in the beauty space. Smart startup Skin Laundry was one of the first to make skin-care memberships a reality by offering laser treatments at accessible price points back in 2013. Two treatments a month sets Laundry Club members back \$110.

Skin Laundry has since opened more than 20 locations in cities across the U.S., London and Hong Kong, and shows no signs of slowing down. Perhaps based on its success, renowned dermatologists are getting in the game with membership options of their own.

In January, [Dr. Paul Jarrod Frank](#), celebrity cosmetic dermatologist and founder of PFRANKMD and PFRANKMD Skin Salon in New York City, began offering patients a Skin Fitness Membership. Those who sign up can purchase a package of four, eight or 12 facial treatments that can be used anytime over the course of a year. For maximum benefit, members can mix and match three of Dr. Frank's most popular minimally invasive procedures: the Clear and Brilliant Skin Resurfacing Laser that helps minimize brown spots, the Laser Genesis that tackles redness, enlarged pores and brightness or the Exilis Ultra skin-tightening treatment.

During the short time Dr. Frank has offered the skin memberships, which range from \$135 to \$325 per month, they've been incredibly popular, especially among women under 35. "What's unique about these Millennials is their perception about the business," he says. "They really don't view these treatments as cosmetic surgery. They view a lot of this stuff as a form of grooming, like getting their eyebrows done or their hair and nails done."

Depending on how many treatments members purchase, they can save anywhere from 20 to 50 percent the cost of a single procedure. "I have tons of patients who used to have to strategize their money versus their laser treatment and downtime, and now they can come in every month for something," says Dr. Frank.

Cost savings isn't the only benefit of these luxury skin-care memberships, though. While some of the more affordable skin-care memberships offer only one kind treatment, dermatologists are equipped to offer a variety of procedures in their offices.

New York City-based dermatologist Dr. Howard Sobel, for instance, offers a Lifestyle Palette membership that is structured around the individual patient's goals and event calendar. A "Hamptons Ready" program, for example, could include a laser treatment, Botox, Liposuction, laser hair removal and facials. Membership benefits at Sobel Skin include discounts on packages, priority booking for appointments and a rewards program in which patients can use points toward their facial and product purchases.

"The best thing about our memberships is that patients can come in and choose any one of the three treatments based on their mood or what they have going on," adds Dr. Frank. "Are they tan? Do they have time for the skin to be a little rough for a few days? Are they preparing for an event tomorrow or are they preparing for something coming up in a month? They don't have to feel bound down or confused."

Just like fitness clubs, however, it's important remember that not all skin-care memberships are created equal. For one thing, unlike Dr. Frank and Dr. Sobel's practices, not all places, especially many so-called "med-spas" offering memberships, are licensed or employ medical professionals trained in using the equipment.

So do your research before you sign up because these treatments do carry risks, says Dr. Frank: "10 percent of my practice is seeing complications from lasers, and they tend to come from these med-spa type of places."

Fellow dermatologist Dr. Joshua Zeichner, who is the Director of Cosmetic and Clinical Research at Mount Sinai in New York City, offers discounts on laser series but doesn't have specific memberships and advises those considering one to look at the way it's structured before ponying up the cash. "If you're getting a high-quality laser treatment and you're essentially just pre-paying, which then motivates you to get your other treatments, then I think that's a huge advantage," he says. "But if the membership is allowing you to get as many treatments as you want as a walk-in type of scenario, then you need to question the quality of the laser treatment that's being offered."

For example, the settings on the lasers used in some skin-care memberships may not be as high as they are on one-off treatments, or the person administering the laser might not do as many passes as you'd get during the same treatment purchased individually. "Make sure you're asking how the treatment in the membership compares to a one-off at that same office," advises Dr. Zeichner. "You don't want to give up quality for quantity. Having more treatments isn't necessarily going to be better than having a single treatment."

He also stresses that likening skin care to a fitness routine isn't exactly a one-to-one comparison. While one workout with a personal trainer will produce little to no visible results, a single skin-care treatment, even if it's a low-concentration peel or a light laser, can be enough if you're just looking for a temporary boost. "The fitness routine comparison applies more to cosmeceuticals like topical retinoids and antioxidants and even sunscreen, where you need to continually use them," he says. "And those are things that you don't need a membership for; they're things you can easily do on your own."