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GETTING *to the* POINT

The truth about microneedling.

Call it dermatological sadomasochism: having someone pierce your face with hundreds of tiny needles. Microneedling—puncturing the skin to boost skin-smoothing collagen—has been around since the '80s, but it's enjoying a renaissance. Why? **"Dermatologists used to use individual needles or rollers. Now the process has been mechanized so we can control the depth,"** says Paul Jarrod Frank, a New York City-based dermatologist.

"The old technology wasn't as exacting." New needling "pens" (like Dermapen and Collagen P.I.N.) stamp the face multiple times per second with 12 to 36 individual needles housed in one-time-use tips. "I have 15 lasers in my office, but I'm microneedling more and more to treat fine lines and acne scars," says Doris Day, a clinical associate professor of dermatology at NYU Langone Medical Center. She especially loves the treatment for patients with dark skin, which doesn't always respond well to lasers. The most high-tech of the new approaches to needlework are EndyMed Intensif and Lutronic Infini, two devices that use needles to deliver skin-tightening radio frequency deep into the dermis. Most doctors apply a topical anesthetic before any microneedling procedure; unlike the home versions (see "Ready to Roll?" at right), the needles they use are on average 2.5 millimeters in length. With the numbing cream, "it just feels like a cat licking you," says Day. And if that's not appealing enough, you should expect to look red for a day or two afterward. Like good old-fashioned sadomasochism, this may take some getting used to: The best results require multiple sessions spaced a few weeks apart.

—KATIE BECKER

READY TO ROLL?

Those things on the left are not medieval lint brushes. They're two of the many "dermarollers" available for anyone who wants to needle her face at home. Manufacturers recommend weekly or even daily use, but many doctors issue one major caveat: "There's virtually no way you can keep these rollers clean enough to avoid infection," says Tina Alster, a clinical professor of dermatology at Georgetown University Hospital in Washington, D.C. And with that risk comes a low reward: An at-home device (studded with needles that are about .25 millimeters long) isn't going to soften scars and wrinkles the way the longer, doctor-administered needles do. "You might as well use a scrub or at-home peel," says Day. "You'll get the same result." Still, some doctors claim that with proper sanitization (like an alcohol soak after every use), a DIY roller is safe and will supercharge your skin-care routine by improving penetration. "The deeper a product can get into the skin, the more effective it can be," says Elizabeth Hale, a clinical professor of dermatology at NYU Langone Medical Center, who recommends the Environ roller to patients. "I tell them to run it over the face, neck, and décolletage for three to five minutes and then apply a topical retinoid or vitamin C." —K. B.

Tread very carefully with at-home needlework.