



beauty answers

baby face

New techniques in **laser** surgery have made it the cutting-edge weapon in the war against wrinkles.

Under the merciless glare of the spotlight, the wrinkles around the patient's mouth look like a tiny topographical map of the Grand Canyon. She lies calmly, her eyes covered to protect them from the light. The laser, handpiece slim as a silver pencil emits a beam of light on the outer edge of the upper lip. Pft! Pft! Pft! sounding like a popcorn popper, the laser emits short bursts of high-intensity light. Each time the beam touches the skin it instantly vaporizes a thin layer of tissue.

Smooth and steady the laser glides over the skin, each burst of light alongside - but never overlapping - the one before. When the entire area above the woman's lip is covered with a fine coating of ash it is wiped clean with a net gauze pad, revealing the reddened skin beneath, as taut and smooth as a denuded peach. Aiming for the recalcitrant crevices, a second pass is made over the skin. The popping bursts of light from the laser quickly outline each face wrinkle. Again the saline soaked gauze pad wipes away the ash. The wrinkles have vanished.

The laser technique just described has been in existence for two years. Physicians had been using lasers for years to treat problems such as cataracts and kidney stones, and to bloodlessly remove tattoos and birthmarks, but the earliest lasers were too slow and weak to remove wrinkles. It wasn't until, the high-

energy pulsed CO2 laser arrived that the wrinkles could be vaporized.

The pulsed CO2 laser emits light that is intense enough to vaporize the outermost layer of tissue while fast enough to limit heat damage in the underlying skin. The heat penetrates the skin no deeper than half the thickness of human hair, so there's



A 50-year-old woman 6 months after full facial laser treatment

little traumatic burning and no risk of scarring. The new lasers are particularly effective against wrinkles but can also improve scars due to acne and trauma.

Laser wrinkle surgery, as it is typically performed, takes only 30 minutes. The area to

be treated is anesthetized so the patient feels nothing. This is not to suggest that laser wrinkle treatment is a day at the beach. Patients must take care to keep the newly treated skin moist. Immediately after the treatment the skin is protected with an ointment and, after the first few days, the swelling begins to go away. After ten or twelve days make-up adequately covers the remaining redness. The skin is fully healed after three months.

Like other types of cosmetic surgery, laser resurfacing is not cheap. The cost for the full face can be as much as \$6,500. But all the evidence now suggests extraordinary and long-lasting benefits.