

COSMETIC TREATMENTS

Red Light Versus Botox: Which Works Best for Wrinkles?

A viral TikTok sparks a fierce debate.

By Tatiana Bido, Aesthetic Content Manager · Published: Mar 5, 2024



If it's up for debate, it's probably a topic of discussion on TikTok. The latest discourse amongst the skin-care community involves which approach works best for tackling wrinkles. While neurotoxins like Botox Cosmetic, Xeomin, Dysport, Jeuveau and Daxxify aim to freeze muscle movement, alternative approaches like red light therapy can also help diminish the signs of aging. The video has sparked a comparison between red light therapy versus Botox in the quest to smooth away the infamous “number 11s.” To shed light on this viral dilemma, we turned to skin-care experts for their insights.

Featured Experts

- **Jody A. Levine, MD** is a dermatologist based in New York City
- Ruth Hillelson, MD is a plastic surgeon based in Richmond, VA
- Veronica Barton Schwartz is a celebrity aesthetician based in Malibu, CA
- Shiri Sarfati is a licensed aesthetician and Repêchage Skin Care partner
- Nerida Joy is a celebrity aesthetician based in Los Angeles

Can Red Light Therapy Reduce Wrinkles?

RLT, or red light therapy, utilizes low-level red light wavelengths to treat skin issues and aid healing. It's effective for wrinkles, redness, acne, scars, psoriasis and aging signs. Celebrity aesthetician Veronica Barton Schwartz is an advocate for red LED light therapy's benefits. "Red LED Light therapy reduces fine lines and wrinkles, but goes beyond just skin deep. I've been using light therapy for over 18 years in my spas and it has changed my business." Barton Schwartz says her endorsement is rooted in years of first-hand observation of its ability to stimulate collagen and restore skin vitality.

However, New York dermatologist **Jody Levine, MD**, says she prefers a combination approach, acknowledging the multifaceted nature of aging skin: "On the skin we have dynamic wrinkles and static wrinkles. Dynamic wrinkles occur from continuous movement. Red light is not going to stop dynamic wrinkles. Static wrinkles are the wrinkles that you have from aging and sun damage and are not from movement," she explains. "I do believe red light can be more effective against static wrinkles. Every time somebody moves their muscles, they will reinforce the dynamic wrinkles, so unless you relax the muscles responsible for those lines, dynamic wrinkles will not go away."

Can Red LED Therapy Replace Botox?

When it comes to the overcompensation of muscles mentioned in the video, Repêchage Skin care partner Shiri Sarfati has seen this with clients. "I've noticed other muscles overcompensating for Botox. You can see this in areas like the nose that you wouldn't normally see wrinkles." Sarfati is also a big red-light proponent, especially when incorporated into a daily routine. Repechage often incorporates red light in their facials and massage treatments. "I recommend using red light in combination with a concentrated serum or sheet mask saturated in replenishing serums. Try the Repechage LED RF + EMS Skin Tightening Machine."

Is There a Downside to Red Light Therapy?

Celebrity aesthetician Nerida Joy injects a note of skepticism into the discussion, cautioning against exaggerated claims surrounding red light therapy: "My understanding of red light therapy is a little different than most out there working with it. The color red, in color therapy, is a stimulant. It can absolutely activate cells, but it also can activate heat and inflammation in the cells." Joy says it's important to consider individual skin characteristics and potential sensitivities when evaluating treatment options.

Plastic surgeon Ruth L. Hillelson, MD explains there are unique strengths of both approaches, but you can't swap out one treatment for the other. "This is basically nonsense wrapped up with some good points," she says. "Skilled injection can minimize recruitment of other muscles. This is rejuvenation in the sense that we can prevent worsening of lines and furrows. LED, actually developed by NASA, does promote new collagen formation and enhances blood supply. But it cannot be a Botox replacement." Dr. Hillelson says the notion is humorous, but not totally accurate.