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We Asked 3 Dermatologists If Red Light Therapy Is Worth It—Here's What They Said

Glow-up or gimmick?

By **Heather Muir Maffei** | Published on July 14, 2026

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Social media beauty trends come and go, but part of my job is figuring out which ones are actually worth your time and money. Dermatologists often tell me they see patients dealing with the fallout of TikTok beauty advice gone wrong. That said, red light therapy feels different. It's been circulating in the beauty space for years, and I've personally become a fan.

I use a red light mask (Shark Beauty is my go-to) a few times a week, I've tried red light spa treatments, and I even recently installed a shower filter with a built-in red light (shoutout to HigherDOSE for helping this busy mom multitask). At this point, red light therapy has become a staple in my self-care routine. It's soothing, and my 41-year-old skin is genuinely glowing.

Still, I wanted to make sure those results weren't just a placebo effect, so I spoke with three dermatologists to get their expert take on whether red light therapy actually works and how to get the most out of it.

MEET THE EXPERT

- [Mona Gohara](#), MD, associate clinical professor of dermatology at Yale School of Medicine
- [Hallie McDonald](#), MD, board-certified dermatologist in Austin, Texas and cofounder of [ERLY](#)
- [Ellen Marmur](#), MD, board-certified dermatologist, creator of [MMSkincare](#), and founder of Marmur Medical in New York City

What Is Red Light Therapy?

According to the American Academy of Dermatology, red light therapy is a noninvasive treatment that uses red or near-infrared light to stimulate cellular activity in the skin. Also known as photobiomodulation, dermatologists use it to help treat acne, signs of aging like wrinkles, hair loss, and other skin concerns. In-office red light treatments are more powerful than most at-home devices, which use lower-level light designed for regular, long-term use.

How Does Red Light/LED Therapy Work?

Red light in the 630–660 nanometer wavelength range penetrates about 1–2 millimeters into the skin's dermis, where it's absorbed by mitochondria within fibroblast cells. That absorption boosts cellular energy production, which in turn supports the synthesis of collagen and elastin—the proteins responsible for firm, youthful-looking skin.

The Benefits of Using a Red Light Mask

I started with Ellen Marmur, MD, a board-certified dermatologist and founder of Marmur Medical in New York City, because I knew she was a fan—so much so that she created her own line of red light masks. “As a dermatologist, I rely on red LED light for three specific reasons: it calms inflamed skin, which directly supports collagen repair; it helps reform scars by aligning new collagen; and it promotes hair growth by improving scalp health,” she explains.

Mona Gohara, MD, associate clinical professor of dermatology at Yale School of Medicine, agrees that red light therapy can be worth the investment. “It can smooth wrinkles, encourage healthy cell turnover, and calm irritation,” she says.

Hallie McDonald, MD, a board-certified dermatologist in Austin, Texas, adds that while red light therapy isn't a miracle cure, it is backed by real science. “It isn't magic, but it's legitimate science,” she says. “Used consistently, it can modestly boost collagen, calm inflammation, and support hair follicles.” That said, she stresses the importance of using it alongside other treatments. “It's not transformative on its own, but it can

certainly help. It's safest and most effective as a complement to more established treatments—not a replacement for them."

TIP

The best time to use your red light mask is after cleansing but before applying skincare.

How Frequently Red Light Therapy Should Be Used

All three dermatologists stress the importance of consistency. "Think of these gadgets like gym memberships for your face—signing up doesn't give you abs," says Gohara. "You have to show up and put in the reps."

McDonald agrees, noting that results depend on regular use. "Most studies support using red light therapy three to five times per week for at least eight to twelve weeks to start seeing improvements in the skin," she says. "For hair growth, it typically takes about six months of consistent use to see results."

Why Quality Masks Matter

Before you grab a cheap option, consider this: "Red light masks can smooth wrinkles, encourage healthy cell turnover, and calm irritation—as long as you're willing to invest," says Gohara. "The quality and number of bulbs make a huge difference. Cheap masks won't help. In fact, using a low-quality device could do the opposite—rather than reducing fine lines and inflammation, it may even stimulate facial hair growth." She recommends looking for devices with at least 100 LED lights and dual wavelengths, and names the TheraFace Mask Glo as a favorite.

McDonald agrees that quality matters. "Higher-quality options with well-studied wavelengths tend to deliver better results," she says. Her top picks include the Omnilux and Shark CryoGlow masks for skin, and for hair, devices like the HairMax LaserBand and iRestore, which are

backed by strong science and designed for regular, long-term use.

Red Flags to Watch Out For

Marmur says there are a few important things to watch out for. “Claims of ‘laser-like strength’ in at-home devices are unscientific and can backfire,” she explains. “Laser-strong light creates heat, and infrared devices penetrate deeper than red light, which increases the risk of overheating tissue. That heat can actually damage elastin and collagen, leading to prematurely aged skin that looks loose or crepey—especially on the neck, arms, and knees.”

She adds that she’s seen an uptick in patients using expensive infrared wands, beds, and saunas who feel their bodies suddenly look older. “Many people don’t realize there’s an important difference between red light, which penetrates shallow collagen, and infrared light, which goes deeper,” she says. “The genius of low-level light therapy is that it works somewhat like homeopathic medicine—the benefits are greatest at the lowest dose, without the trauma of heat.”

Finally, Marmur stresses the importance of considering the source of your technology. “Your skin is a complex organ, so I strongly advise trusting devices designed by board-certified dermatologists over companies founded by nutritionists, pharmacists, or other non-experts. We design for long-term biological health—not just marketing hype.”

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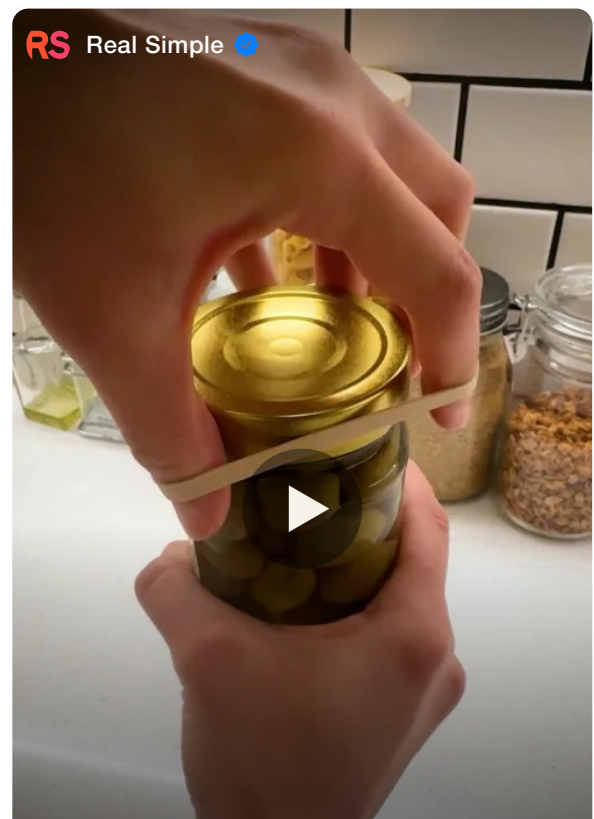
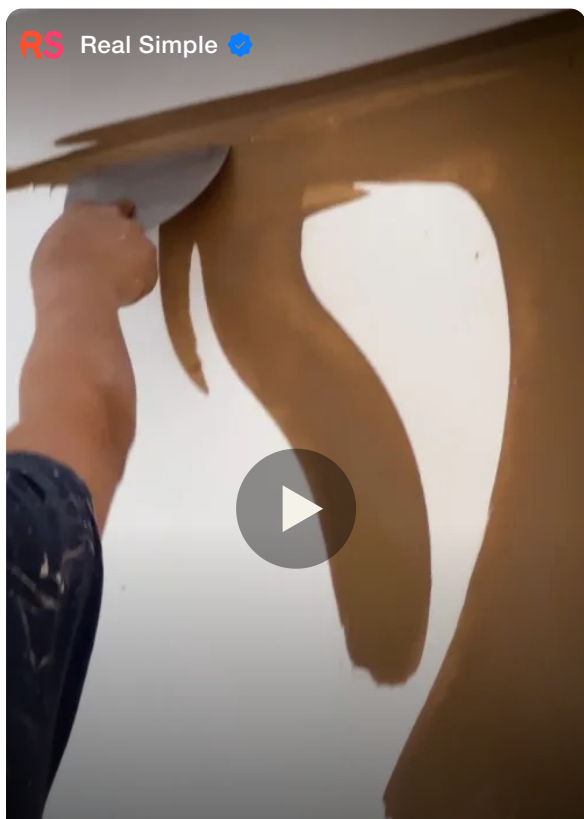
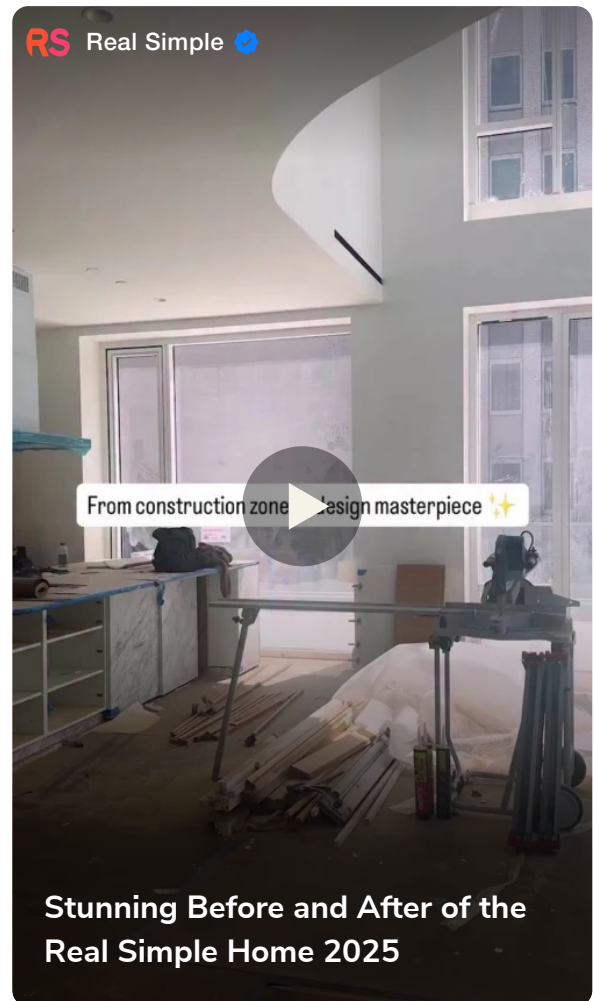
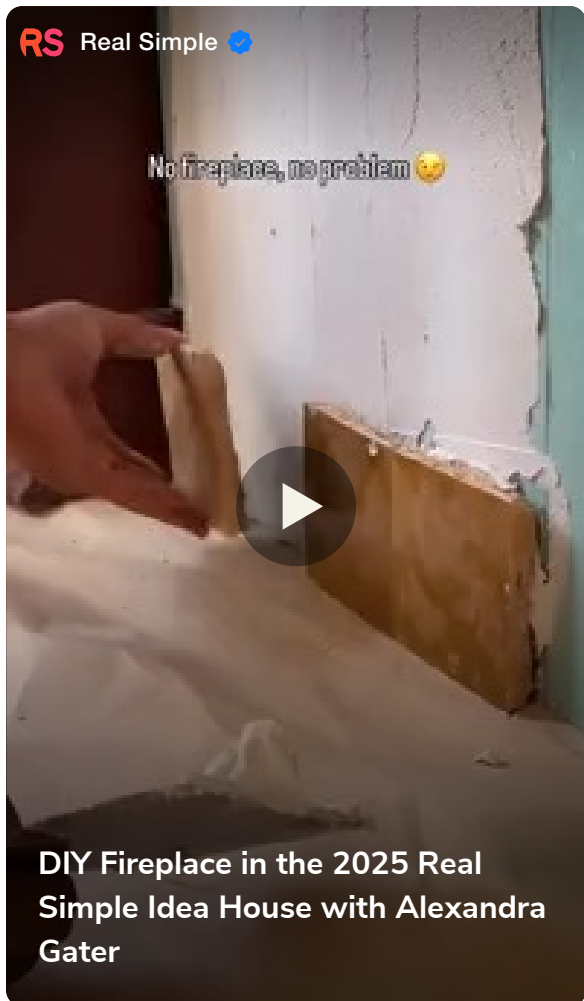
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