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How safe and effective is the slew of new do-it-yourself beauty devices meant to save women time and money? GLADYS CHUNG finds out

Instead of jars of beauty creams and bottles of lotions, picture a row of high-tech beauty devices lined up on a dressing table.

The gizmos perform treatments that are usually done in the doctor's clinic - micro-dermatom for clearer skin, Intense Pulsed Light (IPL) for permanent hair removal and radio-frequency treatment for a facelift.

This is not the sci-fi fantasy of a beauty junkie but a reality in the lives of many Japanese women who somehow seem to be ahead of the curve when it comes to beauty rituals.

These gizmos are now available in Singapore. Priced between about \$80 and \$600, they seem to make economical sense, considering how many times one can use them. By comparison, one can easily rack up

thousands of dollars in treatments at aesthetic clinics.

One of the first to introduce fancy gizmos is local spa Spa-Lon, which has offered DIY devices from French beauty company Talla since 2008. Its latest product is the Cream Booster, a wand that claims to help beauty products penetrate the skin better with micro-currents and gentle vibrations.

Since March, Guardian stores here have sold LMS Spotlights, a range of acne-treating devices from Britain that use LED red light therapy to dry out pimples.

Last month, Nagaya-based health and beauty equipment manufacturer MTG launched the Refa Pro Platinum Electronic Roller, a fancy massager that claims to contour the face using micro-currents. MTG intends to launch



PHOTOS: CLARIANCY, PANASONIC, TALLA

five more skincare devices in Singapore through its exclusive distributor trading company, Toyota Tsusho, next year.

The company which dominates the relatively untagged market is Clariancy, a group of businesses that include an aesthetic clinic and retail outlets, that sells high-tech professional and consumer aesthetic equipment.

Dr Lim Hock Hin, 33, a general practitioner who co-owns Clariancy, spotted the gap in the DIY beauty device market a year ago.

He had brought in the SensiFit, a home IPL system.

"I soon realised that DIY beauty devices were effective and convenient, but they were not being sold here," he says.

There are four Clariancy retail outlets, including stores in Mandarin Gallery and Jurong Point, with a fifth one opening in Bishan later this month. The chain stocks 10 brands of consumer devices for procedures ranging from micro-dermatom to radio-frequency treatments.

Sales have picked up since April, he says, and about 120 units of various devices are sold at each of the stores every month.

Although the demand for such contraptions in Singapore is still relatively small, it is a big business in Japan.

Mr Kenji Nakajima, director of MTG who was in town last month to launch the Refa Pro, says that, on average, Japanese women own about three beauty gizmos each.

"They like beauty devices that are portable and allow them to beautify themselves when they're doing something else, such as watching TV," he says.

Such gizmos are also popular in the United States. According to market research firm Kline & Company, the US market for home skincare devices is estimated to be worth about US\$1 billion (S\$1.3 billion).

But how safe and effective are these

devices that claim to save time and money?

Dr Lim of Clariancy says most of his beauty devices are not considered medical equipment by the Health Sciences Authority, so they do not require registration.

However, they all bear a CE approval mark, which is a manufacturer's declaration that the product complies with the relevant European health, safety and environmental protection legislation.

**NO COMPLAINTS SO FAR**  
A check with the Consumers Association of Singapore found that it has not received any complaints against DIY beauty devices.

The National Skin Centre (NSC) also said it has not seen any patients who turn up with injuries caused by such equipment.

The low power of these devices "is less likely to cause skin injury as compared to high-powered ones used by doctors in their clinics," says

Dr Chua Sze Hon, a dermatologist and senior consultant at the NSC.

"Correspondingly, the benefits from these devices are limited, if at all present," he notes.

Dr Joseph See, who owns See Medical Aesthetics at Delfi Orchard, says even if there is a device that is equal to the ones in the clinic, "the tool does not guarantee optimal results".

It's the skill and expertise that matters at the end of the day," he notes.

At best, the devices can only supplement treatments in the clinic, says Dr Vivienne Goh, medical director of Medical Aesthetics@Clary in Clary Court.

"If you intend to visit the clinic every month, you can't really benefit from these home care powered devices for home care."

Or as Dr Low Chai Ling, medical director of The Sloane Clinic, puts it: "I don't think these devices will replace in-clinic treatments, just as the advent of the electric toothbrush did not negate the need for a visit to the dentist."

**FACING UP TO THE TEST** Urban writer Gladys Chung and

deputy online editor Lyn Chan give eight DIY beauty devices a try

 <p><b>Panasonic Face-Hair tonizer</b> \$249 (88 from December, usually price \$289), from selected major departmental stores, Hanny Norman and Best Denki such as the one at 05-01 Takashimizu Shopping Centre</p> <p><b>Claims:</b> Said to help skin retain moisture, the contraption emits ultra-fine water molecules that penetrate the skin, leaving it hydrated and improving its texture in two weeks.</p> <p>The spray water molecules also help to keep the hair cuticles moisturated.</p> <p><b>Ease of use:</b> This cartilage-sized device is fuss-free. I just had to direct the nozzle towards my face after turning it on. I put it by the side of my laptop and let it blow at my face while I worked and it automatically shut off after eight hours.</p> <p><b>Effectiveness:</b> Once the machine was turned on, I felt a light, cool breeze on my face. I used it continually for about five hours each day, for three days. At the end of each day, my usually oily skin was visibly less shiny.</p> <p>It was also easier to comb through my waist-length hair, which is dry and often gets tangled by midday.</p> <p>-LYN CHAN</p> <p>Beauty power</p> 	 <p><b>Cream Booster from Talla</b> \$179, from selected BKG stores, all Spa-Lon and Sphero outlets, including the one at 01-05 Ion Orchard</p> <p><b>Claims:</b> To be used after your daily skincare regimen, this pen-like device uses micro-currents that allow skincare products to better penetrate skin cells. It also emits orange light to stimulate elastin and collagen production and massage the skin via vibrations.</p> <p>This wand claims to be able to give you smoother, hydrated and more radiant skin after one use.</p> <p><b>Ease of use:</b> This portable battery-operated gizmo is the size of a whiteboard marker and just as light. I just had to ensure that my finger was on a silver button on the handle so that it stays turned on.</p> <p><b>Effectiveness:</b> For five minutes each time, I used this day and night after my skincare ritual by applying its tip in circular motions across my cheeks. I also applied it on my forehead and eye contours three days in a row.</p> <p>I did not see any visible difference right after the first use. But after three days, my skin looked more even, was slightly less oily and had a slight glow.</p> <p>-LYN CHAN</p> <p>Beauty power</p> 	 <p><b>Silk'n FaceFX</b> \$480, from Clariancy, 03-27 Mandarin Gallery</p> <p><b>Claims:</b> Using red light therapy and deep thermal heating to stimulate collagen production, this device claims to help one achieve more radiant skin with less visible wrinkles, smaller pores and lightened pigmentation.</p> <p><b>Ease of use:</b> This battery-operated device is relatively heavy - about the weight of a canned drink. My arm got tired from having to hold it to my face for 15 minutes.</p> <p>My other grouse is that it was supposed to glide over clean and dry skin. However, despite double-cleaning my face, the Silk'n FaceFX still dragged on my skin.</p> <p><b>Effectiveness:</b> I used this three times over a week for 15 minutes each time on my whole face except the eye area.</p> <p>The heat on the device can go up to about 40 deg C at times. I felt like I was holding a warm mug of water to my face, but it was not uncomfortable.</p> <p>After one session, my skin immediately looked brighter. After the third session, the laugh lines were less obvious.</p> <p>-LYN CHAN</p> <p>Beauty power</p> 	 <p><b>PMD Personal Microderm</b> \$285, available from Clariancy</p> <p><b>Claims:</b> Said to offer DIY micro-dermatom treatments, the device uses micro-crystals made of aluminum oxide to slough away dead skin and reveal new skin underneath. It is supposed to give you firmer skin and a more even complexion, with less visible wrinkles and brown spots. Serums are also better absorbed.</p> <p>The gizmo, which is about the size of a regular toothbrush, also claims to improve blood circulation and collagen production.</p> <p><b>Ease of use:</b> The experience, which was painless, was akin to using a dry vacuum machine on my face. The tip - about the size of a one-cent coin - scrubbed and glided over my skin easily while the suction made sure the dead skin, which looked like fine, white powder, did not fly all over the place. The whole treatment took about 10 minutes.</p> <p><b>Effectiveness:</b> There was no immediate effect after the treatment but I noticed my skin was clearer, brighter, finer and smoother the next day.</p> <p>-GLADYS CHUNG</p> <p>Beauty power</p> 	 <p><b>TriPollar Stop</b> \$580, from Clariancy</p> <p><b>Claims:</b> This uses radio-frequency waves to warm the skin from the inside. The heat is used to stimulate the production of collagen, leading to skin tightening and firming.</p> <p>It can also be used on the neck, hands and décolletage.</p> <p><b>Ease of use:</b> I had to apply a layer of slick gel that came with the set on my face before using the device. The gel application can be messy and troublesome.</p> <p>The device also has to be connected to a power point. The heat can dry the skin, so it is advisable to use a hydration mask and moisturiser after the treatment.</p> <p><b>Effectiveness:</b> I used the device three times a week, for about 20 minutes each time. I applied the tip of the gadget - which is the size of a regular toothbrush - all over my face, including the under-eye area, using small circular motions and upward strokes.</p> <p>Right after the first treatment, I saw results. My face was visibly slimmer. Laugh lines were softened, pore size was reduced and my skin felt firmer.</p> <p>-GLADYS CHUNG</p> <p>Beauty power</p> 	 <p><b>Refa Pro Platinum Electronic Roller</b> \$490, from Clariancy</p> <p><b>Claims:</b> This massager from Japan purports to help you roll your way to a more defined jawline, improved skin elasticity, better blood circulation and less water retention.</p> <p>It also works by generating low micro-currents that were first used in the 1980s to help stroke victims control drooping facial muscles.</p> <p>It promises visible results after a 10-minute session.</p> <p><b>Ease of use:</b> The micro-currents in the device are powered by a solar panel on the handle - just leave it by the window or in a lit area. This means it's portable and extremely convenient - just slip it into your bag and use it anywhere.</p> <p><b>Effectiveness:</b> After using it for just 10 minutes, my face, which is prone to water retention, was visibly slimmer.</p> <p>My skin felt firmer, my jawline was slightly sharper and my laugh lines were less visible. The effects lasted for about a day. The massager is also great for relaxing tense muscles.</p> <p>-GLADYS CHUNG</p> <p>Beauty power</p> 	 <p><b>Minion Sonic Brush</b> \$285, from Clariancy</p> <p><b>Claims:</b> This vibrating brush gives your skin a good, clean scrub. It claims to effectively remove stubborn make-up, dead skin, oil and dirt deep in the pores.</p> <p>Use it day and night as part of your cleansing ritual. Apply cleanser on your face then run this device over it.</p> <p><b>Ease of use:</b> A 20-hour charge gives enough energy to use up to 30 times.</p> <p>To prevent over-scrubbing the skin, the brush stops vibrating every 15 seconds. The pause is a signal for you to move on to another area.</p> <p>It is safe to use with water.</p> <p><b>Effectiveness:</b> My skin was thoroughly cleaned, including my stubborn under-eye concealer. The next day, the little bumps around my cheeks that are caused by clogged pores disappeared.</p> <p>My face also felt smoother and looked brighter.</p> <p>However, I felt that using the brush twice a day would rub my sensitive skin raw, so I used it only when I washed my face at night, every other day, for a week.</p> <p>-GLADYS CHUNG</p> <p>Beauty power</p> 	 <p><b>LMS Spotlights</b> From \$79, from all Guardian stores</p> <p><b>Claims:</b> This device uses red light therapy to reduce redness and inflammation in pimples while helping the skin to heal faster.</p> <p>Simply point the lights on your acne for one minute. Repeat a day, for a couple of days.</p> <p><b>Ease of use:</b> I liked how the device comes in handy packaging and three sizes. Spotlight 3, which looks like a lipstick, is for single spots; Spotlight 8, resembling a stick concealer, is to be used on a few pimples; while the biggest Spotlight 24 can be used on larger surface areas such as the cheek or back, and looks like a compact powder case.</p> <p>However, the light from this gizmo can be blinding. While the LED light is safe, look in the mirror, point the device at the zit and close your eyes before you switch it on so the glare will not hurt your eyes.</p> <p><b>Effectiveness:</b> This works like a dream. After using the device on a red and angry pimple twice a day, one minute each time for two days, the pimple dried up and disappeared. It usually takes between three days and a week for my zits to heal.</p> <p>-GLADYS CHUNG</p> <p>Beauty power</p> 
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