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POST-PROCEDURAL MANAGEMENT: OPTIMIZING CLINICAL OUTCOMES IN ENERGY-BASED AESTHETIC TREATMENTS THROUGH TARGETED REHABILITATION

Summary. *This work is devoted to the analysis of the role of post-procedural management in achieving sustainable aesthetic outcomes, when using radiofrequency (RF) therapy and ultrasonic cavitation modalities. The article deconstructs the traditional approach to aesthetic correction, proving the dichotomous nature of therapeutic success, where 50% of the result depends on technological impact and the remaining 50% on the realization of the patient`s reparative potential. The biophysical mechanisms of tissue interaction (collagen denaturation, adipocytolysis) are examined and the necessity of creating specific conditions for the regeneration window is substantiated. An author`s methodology of comprehensive maintenance is described, including the application of alginate occlusion, peptide therapy, corneotherapeutic agents and strict control of hemodynamics. Particular attention is paid to issues of patient compliance and psychoeducation as tools for managing the procedure bioavailability. The work postulates the necessity of a paradigm shift - a transition from facultative care recommendations to strict clinical rehabilitation protocols to minimize iatrogenic risks and prolong the therapeutic effect. Also in the study*

special attention is paid to post-procedural recommendations regarding nutritional interventions and their influence on the patient rehabilitation process.

Key words: *energy-based aesthetics, iContour, post-procedural rehabilitation, neocollagenesis, patient compliance, corneotherapy, alginate occlusion.*

Introduction. Each domain of endeavor pertaining to human physiological modification regardless of the modality of influence on the phenotype requires a competent and qualitative multispectral approach to execution to achieve a stellar outcome. The process of modification of individual components of the morphofunctional state constitutes merely the tip of the iceberg of clinical interventions. Potent leverage resides in post-procedural rehabilitation, for specifically this maintenance system definitively consolidates the result and prolongs its efficacy in the long-term perspective.

Here, one also cannot negate the weighty significance of the aesthetic practitioner, who formulates personalized recommendations for recovery and continuity following non-invasive influence on the soma. The efficacy of any device-based protocol, in essence, possesses a dichotomous nature - 50% of the result depends on technological precision and specialist qualification, yet the latter 50% relies entirely on the patient`s biological reserve and their capacity for restoration and regeneration [1].

The organism, perceiving this dosed impact as a signal for mobilization, activates complex biochemical algorithms of reparative regeneration including stimulation of fibroblast synthetic activity, triggering of neocollagenesis, remodeling of the dermal matrix and intensification of lipolytic processes, which by their nature cannot be instantaneous and unfold temporally over days and even weeks following the clinical visit [2]. In this context, the efficacy of any device protocol inevitably submits to the principle of binary clinical partnership, where fifty percent of success indeed depend on the precision accuracy of the equipment

and qualification of the specialist selecting impact parameters, however the second fifty percent are wholly and fully determined by the patient`s biological resource and the quality of conditions created for the course of restorative processes.

Precisely therefore, post-procedural care to which this work is dedicated must be radically deconstructed and reconceptualized: it is not a marketing superstructure, not a facultative aesthetic ritual and not simply a modality to alleviate temporary discomfort.

It`s a strict therapeutic imperative and a critically important phase of managing the regeneration window, without which it is impossible to provide tissues with necessary plastic material for the synthesis of new structures, competently utilize products of metabolic degradation and transform the induced traumatization into a sustainable, prolonged aesthetic outcome [3].

It is core that the patient meticulously monitors their health status in the post-procedural period, executes the specialist`s recommendations, heeds their own somatic sensations and remains attentive to any symptomatologies which do not constitute the norm. In the paradigm of modern aesthetic medicine, there exists a persistent misconception: many patients posit that transformation occurs exclusively within the clinical setting and concludes at the moment of device deactivation.

However, clinical reality dictates a divergent scenario. Device modalities applied in iContour, particularly RF-therapy and ultrasonic cavitation, do not act in the capacity of a tissue regenerating mechanism mechanically. They serve as a potent biological trigger initiating a broad and intricate cascade of physiological reactions - from the induction of neocollagenesis to active lipolysis, which continue to unfold over several days and even weeks post-visit.

Post-procedural rehabilitation constitutes a critical clinical stage necessary for the restoration of homeostasis, management of controlled stress (thermal or

mechanical) and ultimately for the consolidation of a sustainable aesthetic outcome [4].

Materials and methods. The relevance of this methodological approach is determined by the dissonance identified by the author in contemporary aesthetic practice. Against the backdrop of exponential technological advancement of device platforms, the author notes critical stagnation in issues of biological support of procedures. Existing industry standards are often limited to technical regulations, ignoring the variability of the reparative tissue response, which increases risks of iatrogenic complications [5]. This work is intended to eliminate this shortcoming, offering a pathogenetically substantiated closed-loop model, developed by the author, where post-procedural rehabilitation acts as an integrated link directly influencing the bioavailability of physical impact.

The basis of the methodological architecture of the research is laid by the author`s hypothesis regarding the binary nature of clinical efficacy. Analyzing the biophysics of interaction, Anna Dolia concluded that the technological stage and the reparative tissue response make an equivalent contribution to the result. Technological impact is viewed as a trigger of controlled trauma. In radiofrequency therapy this is volumetric dielectric heating of the dermis to 40-42°C causing collagen denaturation and expression of heat shock proteins, and in ultrasonic cavitation (38-42 kHz) - creation of acoustic pressure exceeding 0.3 MPa for selective adipocytolysis [6, 7]. The author postulates, that without creating conditions for the "Window of regeneration", biochemical cascades lead to fibrosis. On this basis the author developed the "iContour integrated rehabilitation protocol".

The research was conducted at the facility of iContour Aesthetics & SPA. The sample included patients with clinical indications for RF-lifting or ultrasonic cavitation (grade II-III of gravitational ptosis, local fat deposits). Mandatory inclusion criteria were the absence of medical contraindications and signed informed consent for adherence to the strict rehabilitation protocol. Excluded

from the study were patients with systemic connective tissue diseases, violation of skin integrity in the treatment zone, as well as persons, who refused to execute the post-procedural recommendations regulated by the author.

Anna`s methodology constitutes a closed-loop system of two phases. The first phase (in-office immediate occlusion) is implemented immediately after the procedure. The alginate occlusion system developed by the author is applied, utilizing an ion exchange reaction to create local hypothermia and an osmotic gradient [8]. This allows for arresting neurogenic inflammation and ensuring transepidermal delivery of sterile concentrates modulating fibroblast activity [9]. The second phase (home-care compliance strategy) implements a system of strict therapeutic imperative. The home protocol is based on corneotherapy principles for barrier restoration and personalized nutriceutical support (drainage regimen for cavitation, protein loading for RF) [10].

Assessment of protocol efficacy was conducted via the method of comparative analysis of clinical outcomes (volume reduction, skin turgor, edema regression) and the level of patient satisfaction. The key focus became the monitoring of complications, the minimization of which is the goal of the methodology.

Within the framework of the research the author identifies a range of objective limitations, associated with the multifactorial nature of aesthetic correction. The key limiting factor is the phenotypic heterogeneity of the sample, since the individual metabolic status and genetic peculiarities of patients create a range of result variability, which is difficult to fully unify. Furthermore, verification of patient compliance in ambulatory conditions remains a complex methodological task - the impossibility of total control over patient adherence to dietary restrictions and water regimen outside the clinic is a variable capable of correcting the final result regardless of the quality of the conducted device procedure.

Results

Structural and histological alterations in dermal and subcutaneous tissues induced by RF and cavitation modalities.

To form a profound understanding of the necessity of specific rehabilitation it is necessary to shift the focus from external aesthetic manifestations to the level of histological architecture and examine the biophysical processes initiated by device intervention. Any high-tech correction modality is based on the fundamental principle of controlled therapeutic aggression. The withdrawal of tissue from the state of homeostatic equilibrium creates a dosed traumaб which serves as an imperative signal for triggering powerful compensatory mechanisms [11].

In radiofrequency therapy (RF) protocols the key physical mechanism acts as endogenous diathermy. Electromagnetic waves passing through tissues encounter resistance (impedance), which is converted into thermal energy. Upon achievement in the deep layers of the dermis of critical temperature values (40-42°C and higher) partial denaturation of protein structures occurs. Thermal shock provokes the rupture of weak hydrogen bonds in the tertiary structure of the collagen helix, which leads to its immediate coiling and thickening. Clinically this manifests as an instant lifting-effect ("flash effect") however from the point of view of cellular biology this is merely the insignificant beginning in the cascade of biochemical transformations.

Much more significant is the delayed response of tissues to thermal stress - the development of aseptic (sterile) inflammation. Temperature elevation induces the expression of heat shock proteins (HSP-47), which act in the role of chaperones protecting procollagen and triggers the release of pro-inflammatory cytokines (interleukins IL-1β, IL-6) and growth factors (TGF-β) [12]. This "cytokine storm" of local scale becomes a powerful chemotactic signal for fibroblasts. Activated cells begin intensive proliferation and synthesis of extracellular matrix components replacing denatured fibers with new structurally ordered collagen of types I and III. In this period the dermal layer resides in a state

of elevated metabolic activity and acute need for nutrients and hydration to ensure anabolic processes.

In parallel, when working with the hypodermis via low-frequency ultrasonic cavitation a different biophysical scenario unfolds. The acoustic wave creates in the interstitial fluid of adipose tissue an alternation of compression and rarefaction phases, which leads to the formation of vacuum micro-bubbles. Upon the collapse of these cavitation cavities colossal kinetic energy is generated in the form of micro-shock waves and cumulative jets. Since the adipocyte cell membrane possesses a significantly lower coefficient of elasticity compared to the vascular wall or nerve fiber selective adipocytolysis occurs - an irreversible disruption of the fat cell envelope integrity [13].

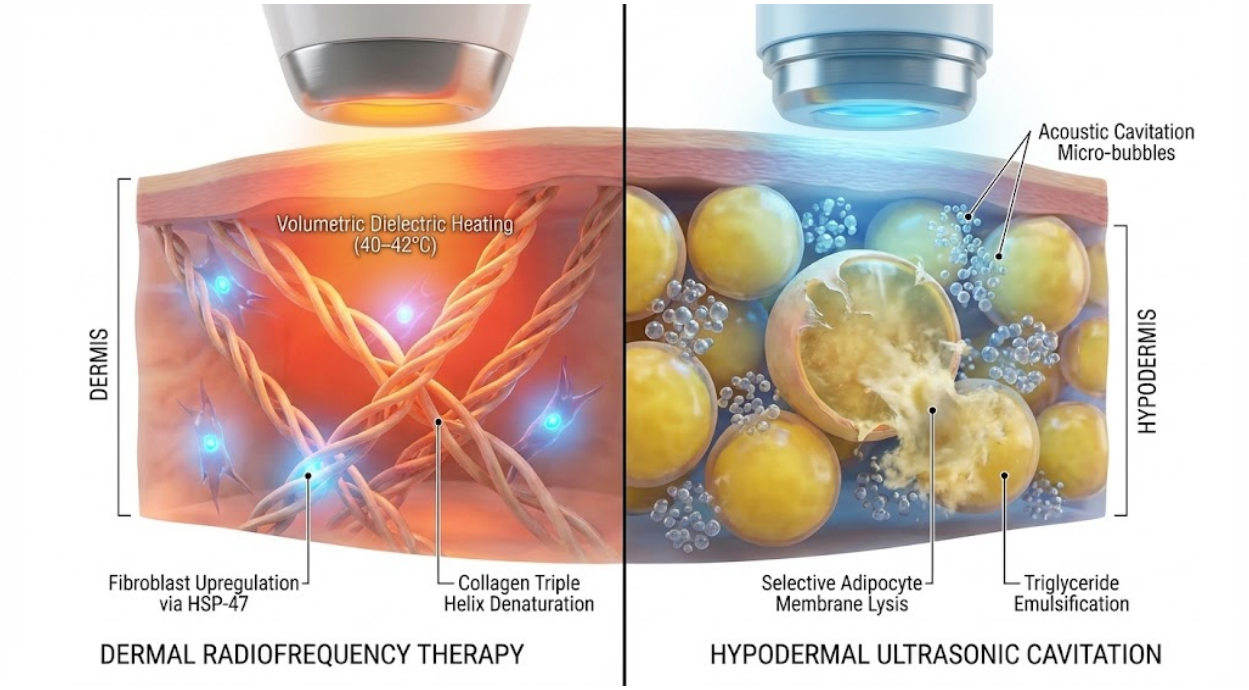


Fig. 1. Bio-physical mechanisms of tissue interaction. (A) RF-induced remodeling: cross-section of the reticular dermis showing dielectric heating zones (40-42°C)

Note the immediate thermal contraction of collagen triple helices (denaturation) and the upregulation of fibroblast activity (glowing nodes) triggering neocollagenesis. (B) Acoustic adipocytolysis: subcutaneous adipose tissue under low-frequency ultrasonic pressure. The formation of cavitation micro-bubbles leads to the selective disruption of the adipocyte membrane and the release of triglycerides into the interstitial fluid for lymphatic evacuation

The outcome of this lytic process constitutes the liberation of vacuolar contents (predominantly triglycerides) into the intercellular space. Here, under the influence of lipases, complex lipids are hydrolyzed into fatty acids and glycerol, forming a distinctive metabolic emulsion. This generates a massive, albeit temporary, burden on the lymphatic system and hepatobiliary tract, responsible for the transport, detoxification and β-oxidation of degradation products [14]. In this phase tissues are infiltrated with metabolic products, local pH may shift toward acidity and the microcirculatory bed functions at the limit of its throughput capacity.

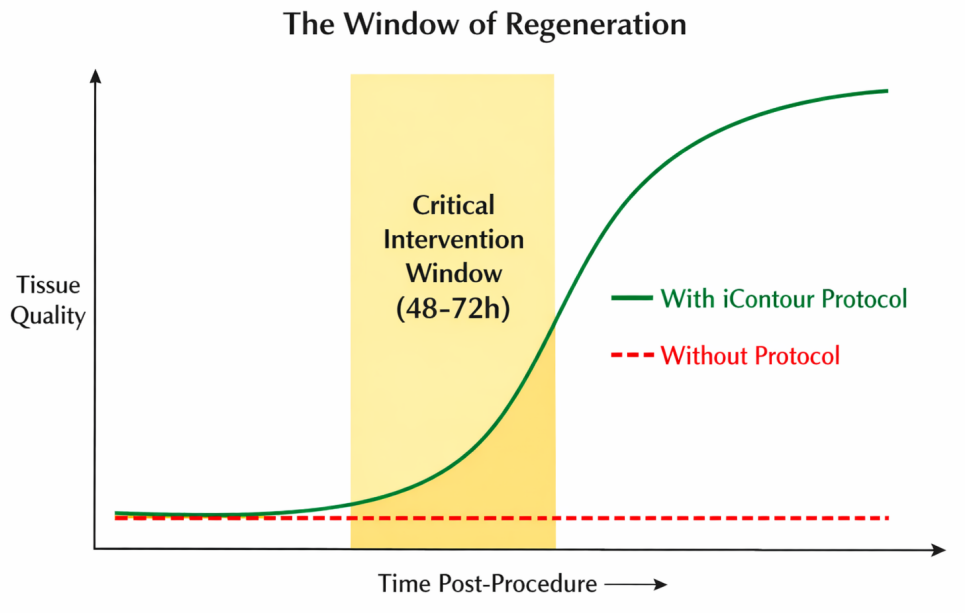


Fig. 2. The "Window of regeneration" model

The author`s proprietary conceptual model illustrates the critical timeframe (48-72 hours) where specific rehabilitation interventions determine the ratio between healthy tissue remodeling and pathological fibrosis. The yellow zone indicates the period of highest bio-susceptibility to the iContour rehabilitation protocol

Thus, in the first hours and days after the procedure the tissue simultaneously passes through the stage of acute matrix remodeling and intensive drainage of toxic metabolites. Precisely this histological status - the combination of elevated membrane permeability, active protein synthesis and high oxidative stress makes the application of specialized topical agents and adherence to a

drinking regimen not so much a recommendation as a strict biological imperative for the prevention of fibrosis and assurance of qualitative regeneration.

The role of alginates and soothing agents in post-procedural erythema management and skin barrier restoration.

Immediately following the completion of the device phase of the protocol follows a critically important "therapeutic window", characterized by elevated permeability of the epidermal stratum corneum. Thermal impact of RF-energy and mechanical stimulation of tissues inevitably lead to temporary destabilization of the epidermal barrier and elevation of transepidermal water loss (TEWL). At this point of the clinical pathway the application of alginate occlusive systems in synergy with soothing serum concentrates is not a question of aesthetic comfort, but acts as a mandatory stage of arresting neurogenic inflammation and stabilization of hemodynamics.

The fundamental role of alginate masks in iContour protocols is based on the physical principle of occlusive compression. Polymerization of alginates (salts of alginic acid), extracted from brown marine algae, occurs via ion exchange upon contact with a calcium activator, transitioning the composition from the sol phase to the phase of a dense elastic gel. This process creates on the skin surface an impermeable film which performs a dual function. First, it mechanically "seals" active agents applied under the mask, creating osmotic pressure which forces the diffusion of low-molecular serum ingredients into deep dermis layers, significantly increasing their bioavailability compared to simple topical application. Second, alginate application possesses a pronounced endothermic effect. Due to the high heat capacity of the gel substance occurs a controlled reduction of local tissue temperature by 3-5 degrees. This mild cryotherapeutic effect is critically necessary for damping thermal inertia after RF-lifting. Cooling induces reflex vasoconstriction of superficial capillaries, which allows to promptly arrest reactive hyperemia (erythema) and prevent the development of

pathological edema without blocking thereby the triggered processes of neocollagenesis in deep layers.

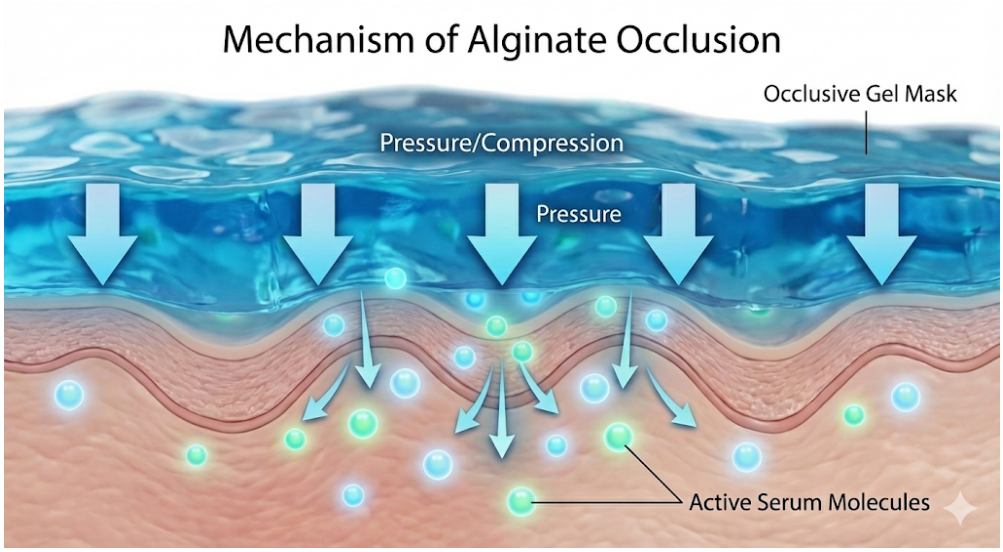


Fig. 3. Biomechanics of alginate occlusion and enhanced transdermal delivery

Generative artificial intelligence was used for creation this simulation

In parallel with the physical impact of the mask, the biochemical burden is sustained by specialized soothing serums (soothing agents). In the post-procedural period the task of the aesthetic practitioner is to modulate the inflammatory response, maintaining it within the limits of the physiological norm necessary for regeneration, but not allowing transition into a chronic phase or oxidative stress. For this purpose formulas enriched with panthenol, allantoin, Centella Asiatica extract (madecassoside) and low-molecular hyaluronic acid are employed. These agents act as inhibitors of inflammatory mediators, soothing nociceptors and restoring the hydrolipidic mantle.

Thus, the synergistic tandem "active serum + alginate occlusion" performs the function of a distinctive "artificial cuticle". It temporarily substitutes the barrier functions of the skin, prevents dehydration of tissues residing in a state of metabolic stress and ensures prolonged delivery of reparative components precisely at the moment, when the receptor apparatus of cells is most susceptible to therapeutic correction. Ignoring this stage or its substitution with ordinary

cream textures not creating proper occlusion substantially reduces the regenerative potential of the entire procedure and may exacerbate the condition of the dermis.

Strategies for optimizing patient compliance: a comprehensive approach to post-procedural maintenance protocols.

Achieving predictable clinical outcomes in device-based aesthetic treatments depends heavily on patient compliance - that is, the patient`s willingness to consistently follow prescribed recommendations. Tissue remodeling does not end, when the clinical session is over. Rather, it continues beyond the treatment room as part of an ongoing therapeutic process. In iContour practice the approach to home-care regimen formulation is based on a fundamental paradigm shift - a departure from the semantic concept of facultative recommendations toward a strict imperative of post-procedural maintenance protocols, the violation of which is viewed as direct interference in the treatment technology and also entails probable adverse consequences.

The strategy of constructing these protocols is always personalized and dictated by the specificity of the triggered biophysical process. In the case of ultrasonic cavitation, where the key task is the evacuation of emulsified lipids, the home regimen focuses on supporting drainage functions: a strict water-salt regimen is prescribed to maintain lymph rheology and mandatory physical activation of the "muscle pump" to prevent reabsorption of lipolysis products. Conversely, following RF-therapy, where the process of neocollagenesis dominates, the accent shifts to nutritive and topical support - providing the organism with a building substrate and creating conditions for the synthetic activity of fibroblasts.

A critically important aspect of the utilized methodology is patient psychoeducation, since a detailed explanation of the causal link between the action and its physiological consequence is necessary [17].

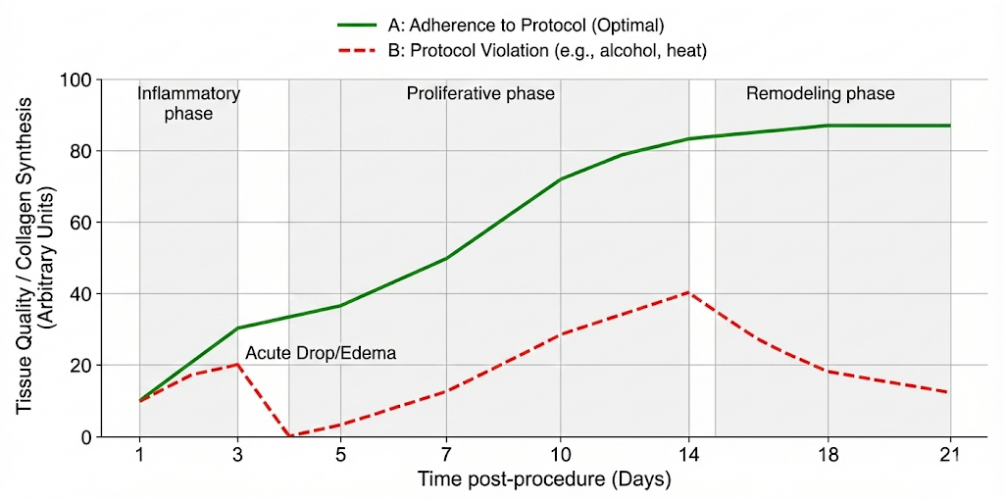


Fig. 4. Temporal dynamics of tissue remodeling dependent on post-procedural compliance

Into the architecture of the personalized protocol is also mandatorily incorporated the consideration of systemic cofactors capable of modulating the regenerative response. A clear differentiation of restrictions is conducted, based on the biophysics of impact. In the post-procedural period of RF-lifting a strict ban is imposed on any exogenous hyperthermia (saunas, solariums, hot baths), since additional thermal load on tissues already residing in a state of controlled inflammation may provoke uncontrolled edema and degradation of synthesized heat shock proteins. Particular attention is paid to nutraceutical correction: the patient must realize the necessity of temporary elimination of products with a high glycemic index provoking collagen glycation and the introduction into the diet of sources of bioavailable complete protein (eggs, meat, fish, dairy products, legumes) and collagen synthesis cofactors (vitamin C, copper, zinc) [18]. Moreover, synchronization of home care with skin circadian rhythms occurs, utilizing preparations restoring the lipid barrier for the evening time when the peak of keratinocyte mitotic activity and epidermal permeability are maximal [19].

Such a multifactorial approach covering diet, activity regimen and chronobiology of topical agent application allows to minimize the risk of

stochastic (random) reactions and guarantee that the patient`s biological resource will be directed exclusively toward constructive tissue remodeling and not toward the struggle with iatrogenic stress. Transformation of the patient from a passive service recipient into an active participant of the clinical process is ensured, understanding that home care is a tool for managing procedure bioavailability and written fixation of prescriptions with clear timing (morning/evening, days 1-3, days 4-7) serves as an instrument of disciplinary control and minimization of post-traumatic complication risks.

Restoring epidermal integrity: the essential function of SPF, bioactive peptides and moisture retention factors.

Realization of the high regenerative potential embedded in iContour device protocols is impossible without the restoration of the barrier integrity of the epidermis and the creation of a specific biochemical environment for the dermal matrix, since the post-procedural status of tissues is characterized by a temporary destabilization of homeostasis. In this phase photoprotection transforms from a preventive hygienic measure into a strict clinical imperative directed at the prevention of pathological healing scenarios.

Any controlled thermal (RF) or acoustic (cavitation) injury inevitably sensitizes the melanocytic lineage, transitioning pigment cells into a state of hyperreactivity. Under conditions of elevated levels of pro-inflammatory cytokines (interleukin-1α and endothelin-1), the impact of ultraviolet radiation, even in its diffuse spectrum, is capable of instantly initiating a cascade of uncontrolled melanogenesis leading to the formation of persistent post-inflammatory hyperpigmentation (PIH) resistant to subsequent therapy [20]. Moreover, UV-induction acts as the main trigger of oxidative stress generating free radicals (ROS) which, in turn, stimulate the expression of matrix metalloproteinases (MMP) - enzymes aggressively destroying both old and, devastatingly, newly synthesized collagen. Thus, the absence of adequate SPF-

shielding factually nullifies the anabolic effect of the procedure, initiating processes of photodegradation at the moment of maximal tissue vulnerability.

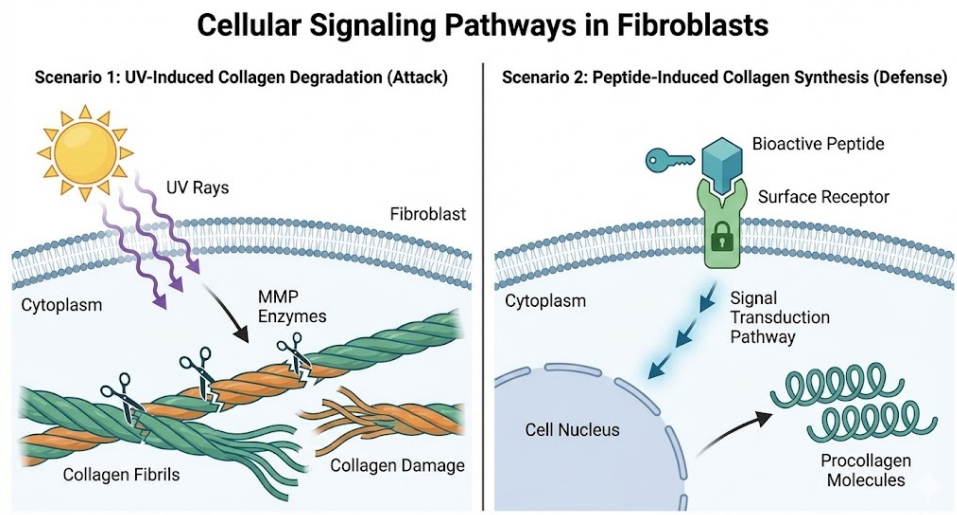


Fig. 5. Molecular mechanisms of dermal degradation vs regeneration

Also with protection from exogenous aggression, it is necessary to implement a strategy of targeted biomimetic correction via peptide complexes, which act in the role of "software" for the triggered device processes. During the rehabilitation period fibroblasts require clear command signals for the navigation of their synthetic activity. Signal peptides (in particular matrikines such as palmitoyl pentapeptide-4) mimic degradation fragments of native collagen, binding with specific receptors on the cell membrane according to the "lock-and-key" principle [21].

This mechanism triggers intracellular signal transduction, which falsely informs the cell nucleus about a critical deficit of structural proteins, which according to the negative feedback principle multiple times potentiates the expression of genes responsible for the synthesis of collagen types I, III, IV and fibronectin. Additionally, the application of carrier peptides ensures the delivery of copper ions - necessary cofactors for the enzyme lysyl oxidase responsible for the cross-linking of collagen fibers and the formation of a durable dermal framework [22].

However, the biochemical remodeling cascade cannot proceed in conditions of a dry matrix, as all key enzymatic reactions of tissue construction from hydrolysis to polymerization of glycosaminoglycans are hydrolytic and proceed exclusively in the aqueous phase. Thermal impact of RF often leads to temporary disruption of the stratum corneum lipid bilayer and a sharp spike in transepidermal water loss (TEWL). Precisely therefore, the hydration strategy in iContour goes beyond the limits of simple moisturizing and is built on principles of corneotherapy - agents containing physiological lipids (ceramides, cholesterol, fatty acids) for the "repair" of barrier structures and components of the natural moisturizing factor (NMF) for retention of water molecules in the epidermis. Restoration of the hydrolipidic mantle normalizes the viscosity of the interstitial space, ensuring optimal rheology for keratinocyte migration and transport of signal molecules, which is a fundamental condition for completion of the regeneration cycle without fibrotic complications.

Strategic approaches to mitigating post-procedural edema and maximizing the longevity of therapeutic outcomes.

The final and defining vector of clinical management in iContour protocols is the strategic control of hemodynamics and lymphatic transport, since any high-energy stimulus inevitably provokes transient fluid retention.

From the standpoint of pathophysiology, post-procedural edema constitutes an aesthetic defect as well as a complex disruption of the Starling forces balance caused by an elevation of hydrostatic pressure in capillaries and alteration of vascular wall permeability against the background of aseptic inflammation (in RF-therapy) or massive release of triglycerides into the interstitium (in cavitation) [23]. Although this reaction is the primary physiological response to trauma, its uncontrolled prolongation beyond 48-72 hours transitions the process from the phase of productive healing into the stage of pathological lymphostasis.

The danger of this condition lies in the biochemistry of the intercellular medium: stagnation of interstitial fluid saturated with inflammatory mediators

(prostaglandins, histamine) and cellular degradation products forms local hypoxia and tissue acidosis. The criticality of the situation consists in the fact that fibroblasts are the main architects of our skin and they are aerobic cells. Their synthetic activity regarding collagen production is sharply inhibited under conditions of oxygen deficit [24]. Thus, the absence of adequate drainage blocks the very processes of neocollagenesis at the cellular level. Hence, the methodology in iContour usage includes the integration of active lymphodrainage techniques (pressotherapy, vacuum drainage) not as an option, but as a mandatory protocol element directed at the mechanical stimulation of lymphangions (muscular elements of lymphatic vessels) and acceleration of metabolic debris elimination, which allows for the restoration of tissue respiration and preparation of a "clean canvas" for dermal restructuring.

In the context of working with localized fat deposits (cavitation), this aspect acquires the character of toxicological protection. Without the active function of the "muscle pump" and stimulation of bile outflow, emulsified lipids are not utilized in the Krebs cycle, but undergo reabsorption by adipocytes or oxidation, provoking secondary inflammation of the adipose tissue. The question of prolonging the achieved aesthetic result is inextricably linked with the concept of cumulative matrix remodeling.

The patient must realize that the biological tissue response is not linear and possesses inertia: a single procedure triggers the process, but only a course of treatment with a precisely calibrated chronobiological interval allows for the translation of temporary stimulation into sustainable structural reorganization. Logically, the necessity develops for the formation of a strategy directed at maintenance therapy, based on the physiology of the collagen life cycle and the rate of adipogenesis [25]. Transition into the phase of infrequent maintenance procedures is necessary for the prevention of the regression effect and maintenance of a high level of tissue metabolic memory. This, in synergy with disciplined home care and control of the water-salt balance, transforms a short-

term aesthetic effect into a long-term biological investment, ensuring persistent improvement of the morphofunctional characteristics of the skin and subcutaneous adipose tissue.

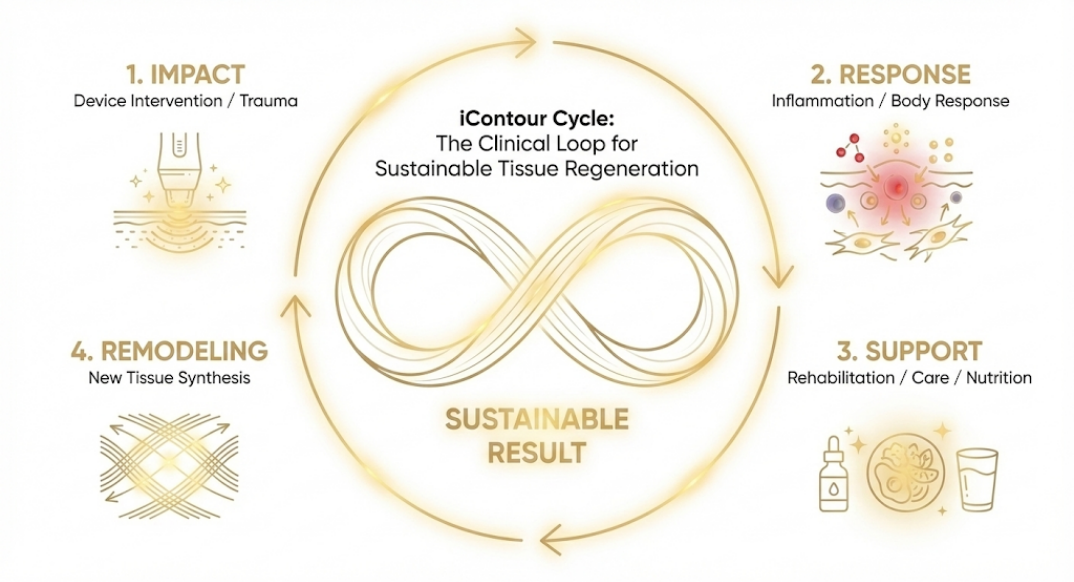


Fig. 6. The closed-loop model of therapeutic efficacy

Conclusions. Summarizing the conducted analysis of iContour integrative protocols, a fundamental evidence-based assertion is formed that the efficacy of device-based interventions is not a static constant depending exclusively on the technical characteristics of the equipment. It represents a dynamic variable formed in the process of clinical partnership where controlled tissue traumatization must be mandatorily synchronized with adequate resource support of the organism.

The absence of a competently constructed post-procedural stage is capable of nullifying up to fifty percent of the therapeutic potential of the procedure, since the choice of rehabilitation methods from alginate occlusion to peptide correction is dictated by the strict biochemical necessity of restoring epidermal barrier functions and managing oxidative stress. Moreover, the management of post-traumatic edema and lymphostasis goes beyond the scope of a purely aesthetic task, transforming into a critical factor of ensuring tissue microcirculation and oxygenation without which the functional activity of fibroblasts and matrix remodeling are physically impossible.

Consequently, a long-term aesthetic result is unattainable without active patient involvement in the treatment process, where strict adherence to home care protocols, correction of nutritional status and consideration of chronobiological rhythms allow to convert the one-time effect from the procedure into a sustainable improvement of the morphofunctional quality of tissues, thereby establishing post-procedural care in the iContour system as an independent, clinically significant discipline guaranteeing safety and high effectiveness of aesthetic corrections.

Ultimately, this validates the iContour integrated rehabilitation protocol as a unique proprietary development of the author. Unlike generic post-care recommendations, this authorial methodology constitutes a distinct intellectual asset that bridges the gap between technological aggression and biological recovery, establishing a pioneering standard in the field of regenerative aesthetics.

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