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beauty answers

switched-on beauty

While they are more advanced than ever, can the new high-tech beauty machines for curling, cleansing, steaming, and massaging really substitute for human touch?

Progress has always had its detractors. Along with cellular phones and Virtual Reality, the machine age has created a generation of technophobes. Never mind that half of the country has yet to master its VCRs; a new slew of fast-working beauty machines is winning over even the least mechanically inclined. These user-friendly gadgets do everything from curling hair and deep-cleaning pores to speed-drying nail polish and giving shiatsu massages. Like much high-tech equipment, they can also be expensive: new safety features like automatic shut-off buttons and stay-cool handles and cords have boosted prices. Space-age appeal aside, are beauty machines really worth the investment?

Overuse of electric hot rollers was responsible for the surge of split ends in the seventies, but state-of-the-art technology is

introducing roller sets that improve hair's condition as they curl it. "The latest hot-steam rollers add moisture instead of drying hair, and give a smoother curl than electric rollers," says Jennie Caulk, senior stylist at Seattle's Obadiah salon and a member of Rave's fashion-design team. "They also work fast—fifteen minutes as opposed to an hour under the dryer—and really hold a set." (The best come in velvet or sponge foam: Conair's new Steamsetter, about \$40; the Caruso Molecular Hairsetter, \$49.95.)

The loose, flowing curls currently seen on fashion runways are often created by a new generation of curling irons with jumbo-size barrels—up to one and a half inches in diameter. But they should be handled with care, warns Beverly Hills stylist Angelo di Biase. "Hair can burn, so it's important to move the barrel constantly. Start at the root

and move down to the ends rather than rolling hair up from the bottom. That way ends don't get singed, and you'll get more volume and movement." (Helen of Troy's Hot Tools, Clairol's Slimlines, Conair's new Big Curls, each about \$15.)

When speed is of the essence—to quick-dry nail polish—the nail dryers used in professional salons, which work like small, cold-air fans, are available to consumers (Belson Nail Dryer at Sally Beauty Supply stores, \$17.99; Salton's Manicure Station, \$14.99).

Facial steamers produce a warm mist that opens blocked pores to cleanse skin (Salton's Facial Sauna, \$34.99; Conair's Facial Sauna, about \$30). New facial massagers are more ambitious. Conair's Sonassage (about \$60) produces 450,000 sonic waves a minute to increase blood flow to the skin and to relax facial muscles; Vittec's new InfraDerm Facial Massager (\$49.95) claims to dilate pores with infrared heat to increase cream absorption by up to 40 percent. These are controversial tools. "Facial massagers can temporarily improve circulation to specific areas and help remove dead cells, but they provide no long-term benefits," says Alan Kling, M.D., a Manhattan dermatologist.

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