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The Dermatologist  
Who Changed Our Skin,  
**Dr. Zein Obagi**  
Introduces the  
Next Frontier in  
Medical Skincare

by Wendy Lewis



**B**everly Hills Dermatologist Dr. Zein Obagi is a force to be reckoned with. He has been an outspoken trailblazer in the skincare world for more than 25 years. In 1983, he introduced the concept of skin health and since then has been refining his approach and concept, including the Skin Health Circle™. He introduced the highly acclaimed ZO® Skin Health by Zein Obagi, M.D. range of luxurious cosmeceuticals in 2007, and is now poised to launch the next generation of professional skincare products.

Aside from his family, his pride and joy is called ZO Medical™ by Zein Obagi, M.D. and represents the final spoke of his skin health wheel. The new range of treatments and products will be distributed exclusively through physicians in the U.S., Canada, Europe, the Middle East and Asia. In many corners of the world, Dr. Obagi is widely considered to be the founding father of medical skincare and his lectures and symposiums attract a huge crowd of physicians, aestheticians and clinical staff who come to listen and learn.

Sharing his medical insights and techniques with the professional community is not new for Dr. Obagi. Twenty-five years ago he pioneered the concept of skin health and conceived of, and brought to market, a new line of medical skincare products – the original Obagi Nu-Derm® system as well as the now famous Obagi Blue Peel®. Today's Obagi Nu-Derm® system and Obagi Blue Peel® are produced and marketed by Obagi Medical Products, Inc., a company that Dr. Obagi helped to found but that he no longer has any affiliation with. After leaving that enterprise, he established a new company, ZO® Skin Health, Inc. the culmination of which rests on ZO Medical™.

Key to Dr. Obagi's new skincare philosophy is the concept of skin health. "Physicians and skincare professionals should focus on making skin healthy while treating the main problems and not merely focus on symptoms of poor skin health or other disorders such as pigmentation, fine lines, acne, rosacea, wrinkles and even sagging. We can address these skincare concerns for our patients quite often without resorting first to medical procedures with the right skincare regimen," Dr. Obagi said. Procedures are performed when skin is strong and healthy for best results.

His circle of skin health includes Maintenance, Daily Skin Care, Protection and Therapeutic options. "Our ultimate goal is to

stabilize the skin. This is a new concept that renders skin more tolerant and reduces the negative effects of sun, hormones, aging and so forth. The first thing we have to do in skin health restoration is to normalize your skin. If your skin is oily, we treat the sebum. If you skin is dry, we restore the natural hydration and the normal skin pH," said Dr. Obagi, the man who first preached the concept that depending on moisturizers alone without stimulating skin and restoring normal skin cellular functions is a menace for aging skin.

He believes that real sensitive and dry skins are associated with genetic or disease factors that can be treated. However, the majority of people who claim that they have dry or sensitive skin, have nothing more than intolerant and weakened skin. "Many people don't understand that their skin feels sensitive because they are using products that their skin cannot tolerate well," Dr. Obagi said. "Most skincare products, particularly over the counter products, don't address the problems of the skin at the cellular level. You need to promote cellular function to restore a strong, hydrated healthy skin. There are no magic bullets. That is the key."



## THE SCIENCE OF SKIN HEALTH RESTORATION

Far from resting on the laurels of his legendary skincare empire, Zein Obagi remains the driver behind all the formulations sold by ZO® Skin Health. He works side by side with a team of cosmetic chemists and his trusted clinical and product development staff who have decades of experience working on best selling skincare brands under their belt. The ultimate perfectionist, he is not satisfied until the active ingredients and delivery systems of each product in the range are exactly as he envisioned.

To reap the skin health benefits of the new ZO Medical™



Level 1: Daily Skincare treatment protocol

products, Dr. Obagi has carefully mapped out a comprehensive therapeutic approach. It begins with an evaluation of the skin to determine the quality such as barrier function problems, sensitivity, dryness, oiliness, color, thickness and fragility. Next a detailed diagnosis is made that includes the chief problem. Then, a treatment plan is determined that addresses the main problem and all other related or unrelated issues. He is adamant that patients must commit to the treatment plan, and that level of investment is an integral part of success with the program.

Before deciding to engage in any procedures such as lasers, peels, microdermabrasion, and wrinkle fillers, Dr. Obagi feels strongly that the treatment plan will establish a solid foundation for the skin. In his stunning Beverly Hills clinic on North Cannon Drive, one of two Obagi Skin Health Institutes, he offers a full menu of cosmetic dermatology and there is also a board certified plastic surgeon on hand for anyone who desires a more invasive approach to the aging process.

## THE PRINCIPLES OF ZO MEDICAL™

The principle of skin health restoration completely revolves around the issue of skin stabilization, which Dr. Obagi

approaches through Correction, Stimulation, Pigment Control, Hydration and Sun Protection. It starts with improving skin tolerance and increasing skin resistance to negative stimulation such as sun exposure. Epidermal renewal, sloughing the surface of the skin and enhancing the thickness of the skin, includes reducing discoloration and restoring natural hydration and improving cellular function by repairing DNA.

In addition to the steps outlined above, the stimulation process involves dermal renewal, which enhances collagen, elastin and glycosaminoglycans (more commonly known as GAGs), such as hyaluronic acid. The stimulation stage also involves enhancing cellular functions, improving texture and color and controlling inflammation, the enemies of healthy skin.

Some of the hero powerhouse products of this phase of the ZO Medical™ program include: REGENACELL™, a combination of peptides, growth factors and retinol used for a mild treatment plan as well as prevention and maintenance of weak and intolerant skin. RETAMAX™ is the highest concentration of retinol (vitamin A derivative) to repair aging skin and sun damage, and BRIGHTENEX™, a non-hydroquinone skin brightener.

Known for his in-depth understanding of pigment disorders and treating skin of color, Dr. Obagi's proprietary skin solutions were developed to stabilize melanocytes, the pigment producing cells in the skin responsible for brown spots or sun spots. Dr. Obagi's goal is to reduce melanocyte hyper-sensitivity and activity by increasing the skin's resistance to external and internal stimulation. He is also not averse to diminishing melanin deposits with ZO peels and destruction of melanin with a laser resurfacing, when necessary.

A basic tenet of Dr. Obagi's mantra is that moisturizers are not a panacea for skin and in fact, they can be harmful. "Moisturizers are much overused in our



Level 2: Anti-Aging treatment protocol

skincare culture. Depending upon them for skincare is the main reason for acquired skin dryness and sensitivity. I prefer to use the term hydration. We want to stimulate hydration from within, reduce inflammation and diminish redness. Moisturizers may smell good and make you feel good, but I want you to look good."

Sun protection is also critical to Dr. Obagi, who advises all of his patients and clients to use physical sun blocks to fight the chronological effects of UVA and UVB rays. He wants to go into battle to reduce UV light effects on melanin in the skin with the use of potent antioxidants and natural melanin that is applied topically. His breakthrough sun protection formula, ZO® Skin Health Oclipse® Sunscreen + Primer SPF30 is on the short list of every beauty editor's favorite anti-aging skincare.

### THREE LEVELS OF STRENGTH

Depending upon your expectations, ZO Medical™ treatment protocols can be administered in a mild, moderate, or aggressive fashion. While the more aggressive approach will create faster and more radical changes, it is not for everyone. You can expect some redness, peeling, sun sensitivity, dryness, and flaking, but the end result can be transformational. "For patients who lead public professional lives and can't afford to look like they are undergoing treatment, we can start with a mild treatment protocol that won't cause these anticipated reactions. As their skin improves, we can increase the levels of potency to make it more manageable, and they will get very good results," he said.

The ZO Medical™ Moderate Treatment Protocol is the next step up, designed for motivated patients who seek faster results. This approach is also used to condition the skin for a future cosmetic procedure such as a peel, laser, or even a lift. Dr. Obagi's passion ignites when he talks about his new way of thinking, and he is so inspiring that every woman in earshot would feel the urge to pull out a mirror to check her skin.

Lastly, the Aggressive Treatment Protocol is reserved not for the weak at heart. Although, deep down in his heart of hearts, he probably considers this the best protocol to restore skin health, he admittedly only recommends this plan for patients who have severe wrinkles, pigmentation, sun damage and



Level 3: Aggressive treatment protocol

acne scars. Dr. Obagi believes that initial reactions are good signs of an effective repair. "The more reactions you see initially, the better the results will be because the repair has occurred at a deeper cellular level. Healthy skin tolerates treatment without reacting; only skin in need of repair reacts negatively at the beginning. Once skin health and strength returns, you will see that the reactions cease. As skin builds up a tolerance, and cells become more resilient, it increases the skin's ability to repair itself," he said.

Not the kind of man who lets grass grow under his feet for long, I wondered what the spry 68 year old skin magician will do for an encore. Alas, he is currently writing an update to his bestselling textbook called *Obagi Skin Health: Restoration And Rejuvenation* (Springer Verlag, 1999), which is now out of print; "It was translated into so many languages and sold all over the world. Doctors have been constantly asking me for a copy, and I don't have any left to give them." For the cover of the 1999 book, he appropriately chose one of Picasso's masterpieces called "The Dream." For this man, dreams do come true. ❖

To locate a physician or clinic near you that features ZO Medical™ and ZO® Skin Health products, visit [www.zoskinhealth.com](http://www.zoskinhealth.com)