Think it’s impossible to erase away that birthmark? Think again.

For years, birthmarks have been difficult to effectively treat. However, new techniques and more advanced lasers have increased improvement—even for the most stubborn birthmarks—and reduced the number of treatment sessions.

Dr. Mark Taylor of the Gateway Aesthetic Institute & Laser Center has been on the cutting edge of this improvement, serving as a consultant to multiple laser companies in their efforts to develop faster and more effective treatments. Dr. Taylor pioneered the use of Cynosure’s Affirm laser in treating birthmarks, and Gateway Aesthetic continues to be a leader in laser birthmark treatments.

More than 80 percent of people are born with some kind of birthmark. Although some birthmarks fade, many remain—and for most people, a birthmark, whether big or small, can cause self-consciousness. In addition, although the majority of birthmarks are benign, some may be associated with certain disorders. Whether you would like birthmark treatment for medical reasons, cosmetic reasons, or both, a variety of treatments are available for all types of birthmarks. Here is an overview of common birthmark conditions and treatments.

**Port-wine stains**

Also referred to as capillary malformations, port-wine stains are present at birth. Swollen vessels in the area cause a reddish-purplish discoloration of the skin, which may thicken or darken over time. Port-wine stains most often occur on the face but can appear anywhere on the body. This type of birthmark occurs in about 3 out of every 1,000 people.

Many treatments have been used for port-wine stains, including freezing, surgery, radiation, and tattooing; however, laser treatment has proven to be most effective and causes significantly less damage to the skin. One recently introduced laser treatment is Fraxel Repair, an ablative CO2 laser. At the 2009 conference of the American Society for Laser Medicine, Fraxel Repair was shown to provide amazing results for reducing the color and texture of port-wine stains, particularly for older port-wine stains. Port-wine stains are best treated early, so that further darkening and thickening can be prevented. Typically, multiple treatments are necessary to maintain results.

**Hemangiomas**

Another common vascular birthmark is the hemangioma. A hemangioma is a reddish spot that usually appears within the first few months of life and grows rapidly for approximately one year before regressing over a period of several years. 83 percent of hemangiomas occur on the head and neck area. Although hemangiomas tend to fade by the time a child is about 10 years old, it is recommended that they be removed as soon as possible, since hemangiomas may cause lasting damage to both the child’s skin and the child’s self-esteem. Even if a hemangioma is not removed, it should be examined by a doctor, because the presence of multiple hemangiomas or very large hemangiomas can, in rare cases, hinder the function of internal organs.

Lasers such as Affirm and Cynergy...
MultiPlex have been used to treat hemangiomas, with excellent results. In addition, new research suggests that the long-pulse Alexandrite laser, which is most often used to remove hair and pigmented spots, can be effective when treating vascular birthmarks. This laser uses red light, instead of yellow and green, to better treat the darker birthmarks. It also delivers energy deeper into the skin, making it especially effective on more resistant birthmarks.

**Deep, dark, difficult birthmarks**

Birthmarks come in all shapes, sizes, and colors. Some birthmarks may penetrate deep beneath the skin or have a particularly dark color, which increases the difficulty of treatment. Fortunately, today’s laser treatments provide significant improvement for even the most stubborn birthmarks. For especially difficult birthmarks, the Affirm and Cynergy lasers have been used with great success.

The Affirm laser, made by Cynosure, combines two invisible wavelengths of light to treat deeper vessels, those not reachable with the traditional visible yellow and green wavelengths. With the Affirm laser, the skin does not become discolored and purple after treatment. The Affirm laser can also be used in high energy mode, treating through a microscreen with small holes that allow only a fraction of the beam to reach the skin. With this technique, small columns of the birthmark are treated during each session. This allows deeper, more aggressive and effective laser treatment, with less risk of side effects to normal skin.

The Cynergy MultiPlex laser, introduced a few years ago, actually combines two lasers with different wavelengths of light into the same delivery system; a high-powered pulse-dye laser is combined with a long-pulse Nd:YAG laser. This dual approach provides impressive results in less time than single-wavelength systems.

**Learn more**

Which treatment is best for your birthmark? While not every birthmark can be removed completely, Gateway Aesthetic’s providers have years of experience and a wide selection of lasers to ensure optimal results. Gateway Aesthetic has more than 22 years of experience treating vascular birthmarks and provides treatment customized for each patient’s birthmark.

Visit our website at GatewayLaserCenter.com to see before and after pictures of patients we have treated using these new techniques, or call us at 801-595-1600 to schedule a consultation.