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THE LAST INCH

Fine-tuning your figure has never been this effective—or this painless.

By Samantha Marshall

The extra fluff of fat below her navel always bothered Emily Blitzer. Overall, the forty-five-year-old mother of two was in great shape. She worked out with a trainer at least twice a week and was always careful about what she ate. But no matter how hard she tried, she couldn't budge the bulge in her lower abdomen. Liposuction was out of the question—she didn't want to go that far. But when she heard about CoolSculpting by Zeltiq, a new procedure that uses Cryolipolysis, or cold therapy, to cool and destroy fat cells painlessly without incisions or need for anesthesia, she figured she'd give it a try.

"My only hesitation was whether it was going to work," says Blitzer, a physician who describes herself as skeptical about any slim-down quick fix. "It sounded too good to be true."

Her Manhattan-based dermatologist, Melanie Grossman, said she could expect to see some results after three weeks but warned that the full effect of the procedure wouldn't be visible until three to four months later. After a month Blitzer saw no change and was convinced she'd wasted \$750 on an overhyped gimmick. But then, after seven weeks, her stomach became flat for the first time since her pregnancies and her pants felt much looser. "I definitely see a difference," says Blitzer, who estimates she's lost about an inch. She plans to go back for a second treatment on her abdomen, which is usually necessary for the best results.

The age of the bloodless body contour is here. Today it is actually possible to freeze, melt, heat by radio frequency, or ultrasonically blast fat cells without damaging surrounding tissue. That means no surgery, no incisions, and no downtime. The devices in question do not remove massive quantities of fat but instead act as body refiners, shaping and contouring abdomens, love handles, derrières, and thighs. For those who do require more fat removal, there is a less invasive liposuction technique known as laser lipolysis that uses laser heat to liquefy fat before removing it, which means a gentler procedure with less bruising and recovery time.

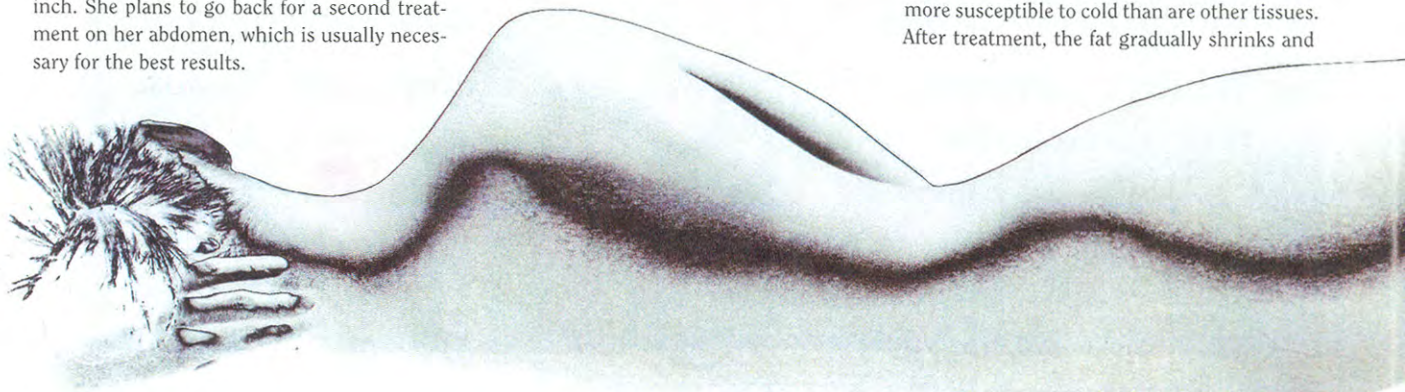
Many of these devices are still in the early stages of development, and the inch-loss claims in their corporate literature tend to be overstated. But doctors are cautiously optimistic about the fat-freezing abilities of Zeltiq, the penetrating ultrasound powers of UltraShape and LipoSonic, and the tightening effects of radio frequency-based **Thermage**. The general consensus on others, such as the low-energy cold laser technology in Lapex BCS LipoLaser or the newly FDA-approved Zerona, is that results, even over several treatments, are barely noticeable. With either, patients will be disappointed if they expect to

drop several dress sizes or lose pounds of flab.

"The less invasive, the less fat you take out, but that's still a great option for many of my clients who don't want, or can't have, surgery," says Wendy Lewis, a leading cosmetic procedures consultant. She adds that many of the women who seek her expertise are so conscious of even the slightest bulge on their otherwise skinny frames that the quick fix offered by Zeltiq is an ideal alternative to liposuction or surgery. Knowing they have this option "means they can have that wedge of brie at the cocktail party without having to starve themselves for the next month," she adds.

Of the noninvasive body contouring devices currently available on the U.S. market, doctors are most impressed with Zeltiq. "Very few patients actually lose weight after this procedure, but they look and feel much better in their clothes," says Grossman, who notes that there is usually a 22 percent reduction in fat in each area treated—just enough, in other words, to see an improvement.

The Zeltiq technique is perhaps the more widely practiced. The science behind it generated a great deal of excitement when researchers at Harvard Medical School and Massachusetts General Hospital discovered that fat cells are more susceptible to cold than are other tissues. After treatment, the fat gradually shrinks and



The Treatments

The best—and the worst—of the noninvasive contouring devices

Zeltiq

Type: Cryolipolysis

Best areas: Back, flanks, lower abdomen

Cost: \$750 per treated area

Pain: None, but there's often some bruising and redness.

Verdict: Delivers what it promises. Patients don't necessarily lose pounds, but they see an average 22 percent reduction of fat in the treated area.

LipoSonic

Type: Focused ultrasound

Best areas: Small pockets of stubborn fat: thighs, buttocks, abdomen, back

Cost: Overseas patients spend \$3,000 to \$9,000.

Pain: Some doctors say it can cause discomfort on a scale comparable to Thermage.

Verdict: It can take off inches, although how many has not been determined. An improvement in the appearance of cellulite may accompany an overall reduction in fat.

UltraShape

Type: Focused ultrasound

Best areas: Wherever there are fatty deposits and an adequate amount of tissue to treat

Cost: Similar to LipoSonic

Pain: Brief heating sensations but reportedly not as uncomfortable as LipoSonic

Verdict: Various clinical studies in the U.S. and overseas have noted positive results, but there needs to be more testing to determine the appropriate energy levels and depth of treatment for each patient.

Accent

Type: Radio frequency

Best Areas: Anywhere there is loose skin—the neck, upper arms, abdomen, thighs

Cost: About \$300 per session, depending on the size of the area to be treated

Pain: Minor discomfort

Verdict: Somewhat effective for tightening the skin prior to liposuction, and for smoothing out afterward, but don't expect more than slight improvement.

Thermage

Type: Radio frequency

Best areas: Anywhere skin needs tightening. New tips allow for targeted tightening on upper arms, abdomen, thighs, and buttocks.

Cost: Up to \$2,500 per treatment

Pain: New cooling and vibrating technology counteracts the heat spikes common with earlier generations of Thermage.

Verdict: Considered the most effective of the noninvasive skin tighteners. It doesn't debulk, but can be a good complement to other body-shaping procedures—tightening loose skin after liposuction, for example.

Zerona

Type: Laser

Best areas: Abdomen, thighs, buttocks

Cost: About \$3,500 for six sessions

Pain: None, except the sting of disappointment

Verdict: "Does it work? Somewhat," says Imber. But improvements are barely noticeable.

VelaShape & SmoothShapes

Type: Laser

Best areas: Stomach, buttocks, thighs—any place with cellulite

Cost: From \$1,000 to \$3,000 for a full series

Pain: None, but the massage and suction may be a little intense for some.

Verdict: Good add-ons for patients who have had liposuction or significant weight loss to help tighten loose skin and smooth out lumps caused by adhesions.

Lapex BCS LipoLaser

Type: Laser

Best areas: Abdomen, thighs, buttocks

Cost: About \$1,800 for 10 sessions

Pain: None, which may be why it's not very effective

Verdict: According to those who've tested the device, results are barely noticeable.

*Additional sources: Dr. Neil Sadick, Dr. Jeffrey Kenkel, Dr. Z. Paul Lorenc, Bonnie Marting, Wendy Lewis