

Freezing Away Fat Is Popular Procedure

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Contributor

(May 26) -- Just in time for swimsuit season, some Americans desperate to trim their waistlines are opting for a new cosmetic procedure that freezes off the body's fat cells.

Cryolipolysis has been approved by the Food and Drug Administration for other uses, but the agency has yet to endorse it as a means of fat loss. That's got some critics wondering whether cosmetic surgeons and dermatologists are moving too quickly.

Such "off label" use is legal, provided a doctor is exercising good judgment and doesn't violate any laws, but is nevertheless a subject of frequent debate. Still, it isn't uncommon in the realm of cosmetic procedures. Botox, for example, has been approved to treat only one kind of wrinkle but is used in dozens of other applications.

"The association does not condone the use of non-FDA-approved devices," Dr. Phil Haeck, president-elect of the American Association of Plastic Surgeons, told ABC News.

Only a handful of doctors are using cryolipolysis for fat removal, and they say they've examined clinical data that give them confidence in the procedure.

"I thought the clinical trials and the basic science were impressive," Dr. Arielle Kauvar, director of the New York Skin & Laser Center, told ABC News. Kauvar and her colleagues have performed the procedure on 60 clients so far, and have apparently been satisfied with the results.

Procedures cost anywhere from \$750, for a one-hour session at a clinic in Denver, to \$1,500 to do

away with a woman's "stomach pooch" in New York.

Cryolipolysis, which was developed by dermatologists at Massachusetts General Hospital, is non-invasive and quick. It works by cooling fat cells, using a device similar to a suction cup, which leads to their breakdown by lipolysis. Fat cells are particularly vulnerable to cold and wither away following the exposure.

"Think of it as being essentially like an air-conditioning compressor," Dr. David J. Goldberg, who is doing FDA-sponsored clinical trials on the procedure, told Elle. "The heat that gets sucked out of the fat layer is deposited in the outer layer on its way out, so the skin is protected."

Goldberg and his colleagues tested 200 patients, and none exhibited any side effects. A single treatment of a few hours can yield a 25 percent reduction in fat cells over the next two to four months.

Of course, the method isn't without limitations.

"It's not going to make someone who's obese not obese," Dr. Mathew Avram, director of Massachusetts General Hospital's dermatology laser and cosmetic center, told WCVB Boston. "The idea is there are certain areas that don't respond well to exercise."

Patients can also look forward to footing the bill -- cryolipolysis isn't covered by insurance -- and being "sore and bruised" for about two weeks after the procedure.