

The cellulite fight

What works and what doesn't in the battle against stubborn fat By Beth Janes

Beach bum
Looking for
a smooth-skin
solution?

People say that dimples come from being kissed by an angel. Dimples on your other cheeks, and thighs, however, are a more devilish sort. About 85 percent of women (and virtually no men) have cellulite; it strikes gymgoers and couch potatoes alike. And there's no cure. What causes it? No one knows for sure, but many doctors say circulation under skin slows (perhaps due to hormones), which swells fat cells. The elastic collagen bands that usually hold down the fat then overstretch or weaken from the extra stress, allowing fat to pop up in between the bands and push on the underside of skin. Voilà- a cottage cheese effect, says Tina Alster, M.D., clinical professor of dermatology at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. (File under unfair: Men's connective bands interlock and stay strong.)

So far in the battle against cellulite, nothing works permanently or 100 percent or for every person. Only treatments that temporarily reduce the appearance of cellulite are available. They're expensive, it can take several sessions to see partial smoothing, and then you need maintenance appointments every month or few months to keep your rear from regressing. If you're very overweight and inactive, results are so subtle that you're better off with an exercise plan first, derms say. But if you're active and need to do something (anything!) about cellulite, this guide gives you the current options, plus a look at what's on the horizon. You'll hear from experts (many of whom have consulted for manufacturers, connections we've disclosed) and women who've tried the regimens about what to expect to help you get the smoothest possible butt for your buck.

WHAT'S AVAILABLE NOW

The super massage: Endermologie

How it works A technician rolls a vacuumlike hand piece over your backside while its suction and motorized rollers suck up skin, delivering a serious deep-tissue massage. Some doctors believe this action only swells the skin's surface, temporarily camouflaging dimples, says Cap Lesesne, M.D., a plastic surgeon in New York City. According to the company, though, the treatment boosts circulation and helps drain fluid.

How well it works Of the independent research that's been done, some studies show measurable results, others show none. But Klaudia Baucom, 47, of Tustin, California, was pleased after her treatments- 14 over seven weeks. "My cellulite looked about 40 percent smoother," she says. The change was gradual, and it motivated her to keep exercising. Once she stopped treatment, however, cellulite started returning within a few months. For most women, the turnaround happens within one month.

Bottom line Endermologie is one of the least expensive options, and it may help smooth cellulite, but you're likely to get better and longer-lasting results from the high-tech lasers discussed on the next page. An initial series averages \$1,000; maintenance sessions, \$100. You pay about \$1,600 for the year.

Spa smoothing: Ionithermie

How it works A spa therapist coats skin with a clay mask, attaches wires that transmit electric currents, then wraps you up burrito-style. The electricity stimulates cells to flush out water and may help moisturizers in the clay penetrate, among other things. That's why skin could feel and look smoother

and your thighs and butt may shrink a few centimeters. But everything usually comes back 12 to 18 hours later, after you rehydrate, says Mitchel P. Goldman, M.D., a dermatologist in La Jolla, California, who offers Ionithermie. The company claims that results can last longer.

How well it works Without independent, published studies, it's hard to tell. Stacy Sindlinger, 44, of Garrison, New York, who had the treatment, says, "My skin was toned and less dimply, but I could still see bumps. It's not worth the money." **Bottom line** Skip it, unless you want instant results (before a beach day, for instance), however temporary and subtle. Each session costs \$125 to \$150.

Cool laser: TriActive

How it works A hand piece resembling a large flashlight massages skin while sending infrared energy below the surface. The energy heats the overstretched bands and the collagen within skin, causing both to contract and tighten. The heat may also trigger the fat cells to release some excess fluid, says Bruce Katz, M.D., founder of Juva Skin and Laser Center in NYC. Doctors disagree on the function of the massage. It either jump-starts circulation to move fluid out of the area, Dr. Katz says, or pushes heated fat cells back in place deeper under the skin, according to Neil Sadick, M.D., a dermatologist in NYC. But **David Goldberg, M.D.**, a spokesman in NYC for the American Society for Dermatologic Surgery, says it simply swells the skin's surface slightly better than Endermologie. Treatments feel as if you're being massaged with an icy suction (the result of a cooling spray). Bruising, the only potential side effect, is rare.

How well it works A soon-to-be-published study by Dr. Katz (TriActive's maker loaned the device; he was not paid for his time) showed that 16 treatments in eight weeks reduced the look of cellulite in 8 out of the 10 participants. All of the women said they were satisfied, even though for most, the reduction was 25 percent or less. Kristi Rook, 33, of Long Beach, New York, first noticed a decrease in cellulite following five sessions. She had twice-weekly treatments over eight weeks; see her pictures at left. Five months and no maintenance later, Rook still rates her cellulite a 2 on a scale of 1 to 10. Valerie Wagner, 35, of Oceanside, New York, said her cellulite went from a 7 to about a 4. Both women would have the treatment again and add that it encouraged them to keep working out.



Thigh Times
Rook, before and after 16 TriActive sessions. The dimple reduction is subtle, but the area looks more shaped. She was very happy.

Bottom line Although you could achieve results similar to Rook's, you might see no change. But, along with VelaSmooth, below, this is the best treatment available. Expect to pay about \$1,400 for an initial series of 16, and \$125 for additional maintenance treatments. A year's investment: \$2,400.

The newest Laser: VelaSmooth

How it works The device, made by Syneron, features massage and infrared energy, as TriActive does, and adds radio frequency (RF) energy. That combo heats skin more than infrared alone, increasing the tightening of bands and collagen and the breaking up of fat cells, says Dr. Alster, who once served (unpaid) on Syneron's medical advisory board. Some derms say the extra heat improves your chance - and degree - of smoothing compared with the TriActive laser. During treatment you may feel a warm sensation and mild pinching. Afterward, redness can last about an hour.

How well it works Eight treatments (twice a week for a month) smoothed dimples and improved skin texture by an average of 50 percent in 18 of 20 participants, according to

Dr. Alster's study, published in the *Journal of Cosmetic Laser Therapy*. After six months and no maintenance, only some dimpling returned. VelaSmooth shows slightly better results than TriActive, says **Dr. Goldberg**, who has done studies for Syneron and is a consultant for Cynosure, TriActive's maker. But in the only study pitting thigh against thigh, the difference was statistically insignificant, says Dr. Goldman, who coauthored the research. (He has done studies for both companies and uses TriActive in his practice.)

What do women say? "It contoured my thighs and tightened the skin; my pants fit better, and my skin looked and felt smoother," says Victoria Duke, 43, of Fort Lauderdale, Florida. She had a series of 15 treatments over six weeks. Others SELF interviewed had a similar experience. Duke had mild redness after the first few sessions and says her results are mostly unchanged despite having no treatments for six months.

Bottom line As with TriActive, you're not guaranteed a better backside, and simply going for one or two treatments won't be adequate. But many derms familiar with lasers agree that VelaSmooth is the top FDA-cleared option because of the added RF energy. An initial series costs about \$1,800, and maintenance averages \$200 per visit. Annual cost: \$2,700.

WHAT'S COMING IN THE FUTURE

Hot laser: Accent RF

How it works Accent uses a type of RF energy that heats deeper layers of skin than VelaSmooth to get an even better tightening effect and more drainage out of the fat cells, says **Dr. Goldberg**, who's done research for Accent's manufacturer. Only six to eight initial treatments are necessary, but it can take three to six months to see final results. **Dr. Goldberg's** newest study shows 27 out of 30 participants' cellulite got about 60 percent smoother, better than what's been reported for VelaSmooth and TriActive. Participants' thighs also shrank a mean of 36 percent (1.2 inches). More research is under way. The FDA could clear Accent as early as this year.

Fat-melting waves: UltraShape and LipoSonix

How they work Both devices use high-energy, focused ultrasound waves to home in on fat pockets and, well, melt them. (The concept and technology come from similar devices that target and break up kidney stones.) UltraShape is approved in Europe, where studies show participants' thigh circumferences dropped 2.5 inches after three treatments. The waves work mainly on fat, so the best overall results might come in conjunction with a laser treatment, which primarily works to tighten the bands and collagen, says **Dr. Goldberg**, who is a consultant for UltraShape. FDA clearance could come later this year or next for both devices.

A dimple-depleting shot: collagenase

How it works The enemy of your face could be your backside's best friend. Your body makes collagenase to clear away damaged collagen, which in your face causes wrinkles, but injected in your thigh may break down

fat to smooth out skin's peaks and valleys. A pilot study at Stony Brook University Medical Center in New York found that injections decreased the appearance of cellulite by 80 percent after one month with no change after six months and no extra shots. But it's a mystery why the substance doesn't break down collagen everywhere, a skeptical Dr. Alster says. A larger, phase-II FDA trial is under way; researchers say the shots are at least three years away, if they become available.

WHAT TO AVOID

Dangerous injections: mesotherapy

How it works Mesotherapy usually means shots of a soy lecithin derivative, phosphatidylcholine, meant to dissolve fat. But the drug (first made to break up plaque in arteries) may also cause bleeding and ulcers. Another problem: The term mesotherapy could, in theory, mean an injection of anything—an ineffective vitamin mix or a potentially dangerous drug cocktail.

Painful puncture: subcision

How it works A doctor pokes a needle in your thigh and inserts an instrument parallel to the skin's surface. She works the tool back and forth to cut the connective bands and break up some of the fat causing cellulite. The procedure is traumatic to skin—afterward you have pain and bruises—and there hasn't been a lot of research showing it's all that effective, Dr. Sadick says.

Until even better fixes come along, if you decide to undergo treatment, keep expectations realistic and your activity level high. That, the women we interviewed say, will help your own bottom line the most.

For more on Dr. Goldberg, visit online at: www.SkinAndLasers.com

Hope in a bottle?

Most doctors say cellulite creams are glorified moisturizers. "Lotions can't penetrate deep enough to have an effect," says dermatologist Neil Sadick, M.D. And many potions lack the support of independent research. What they might do is make the top layer of skin feel or look a bit smoother. Ingredients like caffeine could create a shrink-wrap effect, and retinol, which triggers collagen building, may smooth like a wrinkle cream. It can take weeks to see slight changes, and once you stop slathering, you're back at square one. SELF editors put three new creams to the ultimate test: our own thighs.



Chanel Anti-Cellulite Firming and Shaping Gel, \$75 Our tester loved the cool sensation. "my skin seemed tighter immediately, and after a few weeks, it looked smoother, but I still saw some dimpling."

St. Ives Healthy Brilliance Firm & Glow Body Moisturizer, \$7 The dimples didn't disappear, but "the light self-tanner made them look less obvious and a bit smoother, which was very welcome," says another guinea pig.

Nivea Good-bye Cellulite Gel-Cream, \$13 "The texture and scent made me want to apply it. My skin tone was more even so the area looked better," a tester says.