

Say Goodbye to Cellulite?

A new FDA-approved treatment promises to erase those dimples and ripples painlessly. Is this the long-awaited answer to our prayers? Karen Moline investigates

Cellulite often rears its dimply self during adolescence, as I discovered during the crucial year I turned 13. I already topped five feet ten, was hardly a couch potato and weighed 115 pounds at most. There was barely any meat on my string-bean frame, as my classmates never ceased to remind me, yet the few fat cells I did have managed to lump together underneath my behind.

As I learned early on, cellulite is an equal-opportunity offender, but that offers no consolation to the estimated 90 percent of all women afflicted. Most commonly, it appears on the backs of our legs, buttocks, hips and, less commonly, belly area, regardless of how much we weigh. Some sufferers rush to have liposuction, while others, like me, purchase the various wonder creams available in stores and online. Certain women swear these make a difference, but I have yet to find my miracle in a tube.

So you can understand why I begged my way into a test study for TriActive LaserDermology, a new FDA-approved cellulite treatment. The study would bring me to the MediSpa at the Juva Skin & Laser Center in Midtown Manhattan, a modest-looking spot tucked within Juva's state-of-the-art cosmetic facility. Until now, the only other FDA-approved course of action was Endermologie, a series of treatments done with a mechanical massage device that can have decent results but may leave skin bruised and sore. The biggest difference between the two systems? Lasers. These little beams of light have revolutionized everything from hair removal to eye surgery, and, lucky for me, the type of laser used in TriActive is totally painless, with no known side effects.

Still, my skepticism clearly showed on my face when I arrived for the initial appointment (the first of 16, scheduled twice a week). The doctor was encouraging and explained that TriActive works by reducing the fluid that surrounds the fat cells and results in bumpy skin. My outlook brightened until he directed me to strip down to my bra and a flimsy paper thong. Turns out, >



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I would have to be weighed, measured and photographed in various poses throughout the study. I guess there is a painful element to this procedure after all.

Halfway through my humbling photo shoot, I thought about what Mitchel Goldman, M.D., medical director and founder of La Jolla Spa MD, in La Jolla, California, had told me. Goldman, in conjunction with Cynosure, distributors of the TriActive system, conducted the earliest tests of the system during the FDA clinical trial, about two years ago. "Cellulite is what every woman is supposed to have," he explained. "It's basically a fat-storage mechanism so that when you become pregnant and breast-feed, you'll have adequate fat readily available. The honeycomb appearance occurs because fat in females is stored in little packets."

Cellulite happens when the bands of fibrous tissue that connect our muscles to our skin grow too tight and perfectly normal fat packets get compressed. Trapped in the tissue, the fat swells tremendously and the cells clump together. As we age, the connective tissue becomes less resilient, so cellulite can worsen. What causes it to plague some women more than others is not well understood. "The truth is, no one knows for sure what makes ordinary fat cells become enlarged fat globules," says Kathryn Frew, M.D., the Juva dermatologist heading the study. "There is a hormonal component due to estrogen, as well as a genetic component, and these are certainly exacerbated by a sedentary lifestyle. Now we're starting to look at microcirculation. If there's an obstruction of lymphatic fluid flowing between the enlarged fat cells and the surrounding blood vessels and fibrous tissue, the result will be cellulite."

It just might work, I told myself as my first treatment began. "This is a bit cold," said the technician, as she clutched the wand at the tip of the hose, which contained a round, pulsating metal head. She turned on the laser, which caused the machine to beep annoyingly, and ran the head in slow circles on my belly and around my thighs. It wasn't just a little cold—it was freezing. But as I got used to the instrument's painless, rhythmic massage, trailing up and down my legs to improve lymphatic circulation, I found it extremely relaxing as I visualized the fat clumps being pushed out forevermore. After nearly 45 minutes, I rose from the table and ran straight to the loo, a sign that perhaps the lymphatic drainage was working.

The TriActive method performs in three ways. There is the actual laser, which doctors believe penetrates the clumped-up fat cells, minimizing them and improving microcirculation. Since TriActive doesn't penetrate deeply, as some other lasers do, there is no pain involved and you don't need to wear protective eyewear, as you would with hair-removal lasers. The head of the wand massages the skin to stimulate collagen production, toning and lymphatic drainage. It also cools the skin to stimulate microcirculation, which helps reduce the swollen fat cells.

After the 12th session, I was amazed to see a visible difference. Yes, I'd lost some weight from the stress of a hectic move, but the skin on the backs of my thighs and butt was tighter, trimmer

and noticeably smoother. Despite the hassle of twice-weekly appointments, I looked forward to the massage. I never saw a bruise, although I'm told women with sensitive skin might get a few small ones. After 16 sessions, I wasn't entirely cellulite-free, but the situation was about 50 percent better. Some women will see major improvement, as I did. Others will see partial to little or no change, particularly those who are already overweight, because the laser may not work as well on areas with large amounts of excess fat. At least 12 to 16 thirty-minute sessions once or twice a week are required for the fat cells to start deflating. After that, you need to go twice a month or at least monthly in perpetuity to keep the cells from reclumping.

For me, taking the time to undergo the regimen and seeing decent results were a spur to keep the weight off, work out harder and go for maintenance visits. Who knows how long the results will last? The machine is too new for us to know for certain. For some women, this could be the miracle they've been praying for; others may be less than impressed. "There will never be a cure for cellulite," says Goldman. Neither my bottom nor I have gone to medical school, but we sure hope the good doctor is wrong. ■

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The following locations offer the TriActive LaserDermology treatment: Juva Skin & Laser Center MediSpa, NYC (15 sessions, \$1200; 212-688-5882); Cellulite Endermologie Center, NYC (Quick fix, \$150; 12 sessions, \$1500; 800-430-7545); La Jolla Spa MD, La Jolla, CA (\$100 per treatment; 858-459-6868).

The Best New Cellulite Products



1. **Clarins** Total Body Lift, \$56.50. gloss.com.
2. **Nivea** Body Reshaping Treatment, \$12.99. niveausa.com.
3. **Shiseido** Body Creator Aromatic Firming Cream, \$55. Nordstrom; 800-7-BEAUTY.
4. **L'Oréal** Sublime Slim Night Anti-Cellulite + Smoothing Body Toning Gel, \$13.89. lorealparisusa.com