

Freeze Your Fat Away

A new, high-tech procedure at the dermatologist's office zaps unwanted bulges — no needles or scalpels required.

By Jennifer Tung



DIEGO ALVAREZ DE TOLEDO/ISTOCK

Since my teens, I've been dogged by my secret fat: a stubborn slab across my lower abdomen that no amount of running would remedy. It was an irritating ripple that seemed to double in size from morning to night, yet it was also isolated enough to conceal in well-cut clothes. On bad days, I could gather it in my hands and fashion it into a giant bagel, which dampened my mood almost to the point of distraction. It was impervious to exercise and diet (I eat pretty healthily), and, since my two pregnancies, it had rested above a depressingly wide horizontal crease above my bikini line. It looked like my whole torso was frowning.

So my usual skepticism was trumped by sheer, childlike giddiness when I learned that my roll of shame was the perfect target for a new, noninvasive gadget called Zeltiq, which permanently zaps fat on the stomach, waist, hips, and back via Cryolipolysis (translation: freezing it). "It's best suited for women who are close to ideal body weight with specific areas of unwanted

fat, like the belly," said Dr. Jeffrey Dover, an associate clinical professor of dermatology at Yale University School of Medicine and the chairman of the scientific advisory board of Zeltiq. Had he seen my vacation photos? "These candidates can be as fit as possible," Dover added, "and they'll still never get rid of that fat." I felt strangely absolved, realizing that I'd viewed my band of blubber as a personal failure. I also realized how much emotional energy I've spent trying to accept my stomach the way it is (I've carried two precious boys, blah, blah)—to no avail. Did this mean I was incredibly vain, or insecure, or both? Suddenly, a new question popped into my head: Who cares?

I scheduled a consultation with dermatologist Dr. Arielle Kauvar, the gentle but no-nonsense director of New York Laser & Skin Care, who has been using the machine on patients since last fall. Zeltiq has been approved for fat removal in Europe, Asia, and South America since mid-2009. In the U.S., it's FDA-approved for skin anesthesia but is still under review for fat removal. In the meantime, a handful of American doctors are using it off-label (a legal practice).

"Fat cells are damaged at a higher temperature than normal tissue and nerves," Kauvar explained. "This device extracts heat and cools the skin so the fat in cells crystallizes, then is slowly eliminated over two months, and the bulge gets smaller. And fat cells do not regenerate." (Dover later explained that once frozen, the cells dissolve and the released fat is likely processed by the liver. Clinical trials reported an average fat-layer reduction of 22.4 percent as measured by ultrasound.) Kauvar moved on to the nuts and bolts. "There's no anesthesia, no needles. I attach the device to you with a vacuum, and it sucks the fat area into the applicator. You sit for an hour each session and may feel bruised or numb for about two weeks. Now, shall we take a look?"

I stood up. Kauvar crouched down in front of me, and I lifted my shirt, squeezing my flab as she