

Vacuum sealed

Latest trend for reshaping your figure quite literally sucks



PHOTO: Nick Dolding/Getty Images

By Fiona Kirk Tuesday, December 13, 2011

Botox is so yesterday: The latest trend in elective cosmetic procedures is “non-invasive body contouring.” With slick names like CoolSculpting and LipoSonix, the procedures promise to get rid of love handles and smooth cellulite without surgery, anesthesia or recovery time.

“It’s going to be an explosion over the next five years,” said Dr. David Goldberg, director of Skin Laser and Surgery Specialists of New York and New Jersey. Although there is a wide range of body sculpting treatments available, each method typically employs deep-tissue vacuum massage along with one or two other components, like laser and ultrasound, to damage the fat cells in a specific area, which are then eliminated naturally by the body. Many procedures are performed by doctors; others, by licensed professionals.

Bella Contour, a newer procedure — and one being vigorously publicized — claims to offer immediate but temporary results, through a combination of ultrasound, electrical stimulation and vacuum massage. The procedure requires three to five initial treatments, with follow-ups every six months to a year. CoolSculpting works by freezing the fat cells and, like many of the treatments, is most effective in people who are already in good shape but want to reduce fat in isolated areas. LipoSonix utilizes high-intensity, focused ultrasound for the permanent removal of fat. Costs for the various procedures range from \$300 per session up to \$2,000.

Endermologie, one of the more established vacuuming technologies and the first to be approved by the Food and Drug Administration, gently lifts and pulls the skin tissue, which “reactivates deep dormant cellular activity,” according to the website. The technology is not just in doctors’ offices — spas and beauty centers can be licensed (there are only two such spas in the United States, both in New York City). According to reviews, some users experience redness and bruising but say it doesn’t hurt that much. Goldberg said that CoolSculpting aches a little and some people complain about tingling, but it fades.

Dr. Richard Baxter, a Seattle plastic surgeon, suggests that consumers carefully research each procedure. “If there were one, well-proven treatment for cellulite, everyone would know about it,” said Baxter, who advises going on the website fda.gov to learn what each technique is specifically indicated for. “You have to take the claims with a grain of salt.”

It’s up to the individual to determine which body-contouring method is right for them in terms of price, time commitment and the desire for long- or short-term results. The procedures are best done by a dermatologist or plastic surgeon skilled in a variety of the techniques. “The efficacy of the technique is directly related to the people delivering those treatments,” said Goldberg.