

CLOTHING OPTIONAL

The body of your dreams might be as close as a few zaps, radio waves, or even icicles away. Sarah Brown reports on the physique-focused technology that is targeting cellulite, recontouring curves, and literally blasting away the bulges. Photographed by Peter Lindbergh.



AU NATUREL

Brazilian bombshell
Caroline Trentini.
Hair, Orlando Pita
for Orlo Salon;
makeup, Gucci
Westman for Revlon.

Sittings Editor:
Phyllis Posnick.

Finding a woman who is completely satisfied with her body is about as likely as coming across an Alexander McQueen armadillo shoe at a vintage store. It just doesn't happen very often. No matter their age, most women feel unfairly plagued by something—backs of arms, thighs, buttocks, stomach, take your pick. And for all of those women who are able to successfully eliminate that trouble spot through diet and exercise, there are just as many who, for reasons of genetics, will never be able to make it budge, no matter the austerity measures they take.

For Shara, a fit 28-year-old in digital marketing, it's the noticeable roll around her middle. When we meet, she is waiting patiently in a treatment room at plastic surgeon Haideh Hirmand, M.D.'s, Park Avenue offices. She is here for CoolSculpting, a sophisticated system that will selectively freeze those unwanted fat cells, causing them to miraculously disappear. (Six months ago, Hirmand used the same device to target a bulge on Shara's upper back continually squished by her bra straps.) Across the hall, a 40-year-old publishing executive whom we'll call Jenny is lying on her back scrolling through e-mail on her BlackBerry. A mother of two young children who still finds time to lunge, punch, and high-kick her way through a dance-cardio workout four, sometimes five, times a week, Jenny is here to erase the stubborn layer of fat that stands between her and a flat—or even just flat-ter—stomach. Her weapon of choice: Liposonix, an ultrasound device that will heat that fat so that it just melts away.

Welcome to the latest cosmetic frontier. Now that doctors have our faces pretty well under control (Younger, fresher you? Presto), the focus has moved below the chin. A wave of futuristic new machines uses a range of energy sources to whittle away resistant problem areas and tighten skin—most of them in about an hour, with little or no recovery time.

While the new body-contouring devices all aim to take off inches, doctors are up-front that none of them produce the dramatic results achieved with liposuction. (If you thought lipo, which physically removes fat via suction, was beginning to sound like a relic from the Dark Ages—i.e., the eighties, when it was introduced—consider this: It was the number-one most-performed cosmetic surgical procedure in the United States last year, with more than 325,000 cases.) Still, the new nonsurgical options represent a bona fide phenomenon. Think of it as the difference between Botox and a brow-lift—they're both solving a similar problem; one is a bigger fix. "If you can get near-lipo results at a fraction of the cost and with no downtime, there's value there," says Grant Stevens, M.D., clinical professor of plastic surgery at USC. Indeed, while lipo requires anesthesia, up to a week out of commission, and another few weeks in a girdle, patients who've experienced one of the new noninvasive treatments generally hop off the table and go back to work.

The key to success with this generation of faster, cheaper options is having a clear grasp of their limitations and an appreciation for the fact that they are brand-new. Doctors are still mastering them; the technology keeps evolving. So far, the most suitable patients are those like Shara and Jenny who exercise regularly and eat well to begin with, but can't seem to lose the last few inches. "These nonsurgical modalities give the ability to make subtle changes (continued on page 373)



Harvard scientists who were inspired by the way kids suck on Popsicles. “They observed that they’d stick it adjacent to the cheek and get atrophy of fat in the area, which would dissolve away because it was cooled off,” explains Trevor Born, M.D., a plastic surgeon with offices in Toronto and New York. During the hour-long procedure, a pinchable bulge with good skin tone, like Shara’s stomach roll, is sucked into a hollow rectangular hand piece (“like if you put your hand over a vacuum,” says Shara), and then . . . frozen. When the suction mechanism releases the patient’s skin, it has been chilled into what resembles a stick of butter. “It’s not painful,” Shara said pleasantly after her treatment, while massaging the frosty (and temporarily rectangular-looking) portion of her stomach back to its natural shape. “It feels numb, like ice.” The procedure, which starts at around \$800, promises a 20 percent reduction in fat after one session. (The crystallized cells slowly die and are metabolized over a two-to-three-month period.) Born, who has tried it himself, finds that it consistently delivers “smooth, tapered results. Definitely, it works,” he says. New attachments designed to fit smaller, curved areas like the knees, inner thigh, and hated arm wattle—places that Born notes are not always good candidates for liposuction due to the risk of causing an irregularity—are coming soon.

Liposonix, on the other hand, which melts fat cells via high-intensity focused ultrasound, is suited to broader, more diffuse fat zones. “The materials say this can get me down one dress size, and that’s really what I’m looking for,” reflected Jenny as Hirmand placed the stamp-like hand piece onto one of 24 numbered squares mapped out in a grid across her stomach. “I don’t think I’m ever going to be a size 2,” she continued, “but that’s OK; I just want to be the best me.” Results, which take several months to fully manifest, appear after one session (from \$2,500). The experience can be uncomfortable, though every patient responds differently, and the heat can be dialed down.

Exilis, meanwhile, heats the deep layers of the skin via radio frequency, or radio waves, speeding up the metabolism of fat cells to shrink them, rather than killing them. Two settings used either separately or in tandem—one to reduce fat, another to tighten skin—are among its selling points. Stevens calls the experience *(continued on page 374)*

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in contour. None of these are good for people who are fat,” deadpans Stevens. “This is not about weight reduction, it’s about *sculpting*.”

“I tell people, look, if you want to get everything out, if you want to contour everything in one go, don’t do this—do the lipo,” says Hirmand. “But if you’re happy having this area or bulge go down by a certain percentage, then do this.”

Of all the available options—the fat-fighting landscape is crowded with seductively marketed new machines promising magic—the ones from which doctors are seeing the best results are CoolSculpting, Liposonix, and Exilis.

CoolSculpting was developed by

(continued from page 373) “pain-free,” which may be why it’s such a hit with patients. Still, the trade-off with less pain is less gain: It requires three to six sessions (\$500 each) to yield the best results.

And then, in a category all its own, there’s Cellulaze. FDA-approved this past January, it bills itself as the first and only treatment to attack cellulite from the inside out. Cellulite, which affects approximately 85 percent of women, is tricky to treat: It’s not really about fat (the skinniest among us get it); rather it’s a texture problem created by structural issues beneath the skin. Under local anesthesia, a fiber with a laser on one end is threaded through a small incision and pointed in specifically calculated angles, firing away in one direction at the lumpy pockets of trapped fat that create rippling hills, in another to break apart the fibrous bands that pull skin down into dimpled valleys, and in yet another to stimulate new collagen growth, to help even out the skin’s surface appearance.

“It’s very meticulous work, like crocheting,” explains Manhattan dermatologist Patricia Wexler, M.D., who is familiar with the technology. It takes about six weeks (while the fibroblasts are making new collagen) to start seeing results, and since the technology is so new, it’s hard to say how long those results will last, though preliminary reports indicate more than a year. (Cost: from \$5,000.)

“There is no question that it works, but I want to see how well it works,” says Pittsburgh-based Leo McCafferty, M.D., president of the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery. Like Wexler and Born, he is choosing to wait before adopting Cellulaze into his own practice.

As McCafferty points out, these new machines are still just the beginning of what’s to come: “It’s like the cell phone in the 1980s—now it’s an iPhone.”

Ten weeks after her treatment, Jenny e-mails an update: “Just wanted to let you

know I got measured by Dr. Hirmand today,” she writes. So far, she’s lost one and a half inches from her lower abs, an inch from her upper abs, and an additional five pounds she attributes to diet and exercise. Still, all is not perfect. “While I am very happy to have tightened up, I am hoping to see a little more of a result from the treatment,” she admits. “If not, I will likely pursue liposuction at some point to really flatten out this stubborn area. I am definitely glad I did it,” she continues. “To avoid surgery, I do think it’s a good alternative—or at least a relatively easy and painless first step.”

Meanwhile, Shara is practically bouncing off the walls. “AWESOME” is her response when I ask how she looks. “I wore a dress last night, and it was such a difference—wearing the same dress before and now. Years and years of working out and being very disciplined, and you still get that miserable extra inch.” Now, she says, “that annoying little piece is gone. Thank God.” □