

is there finally a cure for cellulite?

Nine out of 10 women have cellulite, and we spend an estimated \$3 billion a year trying to get rid of it—even though every shred of medical evidence proves that the wraps, creams and potions don't work. So why has the FDA recently given a new massage treatment the thumbs-up?

by Laurel Touby

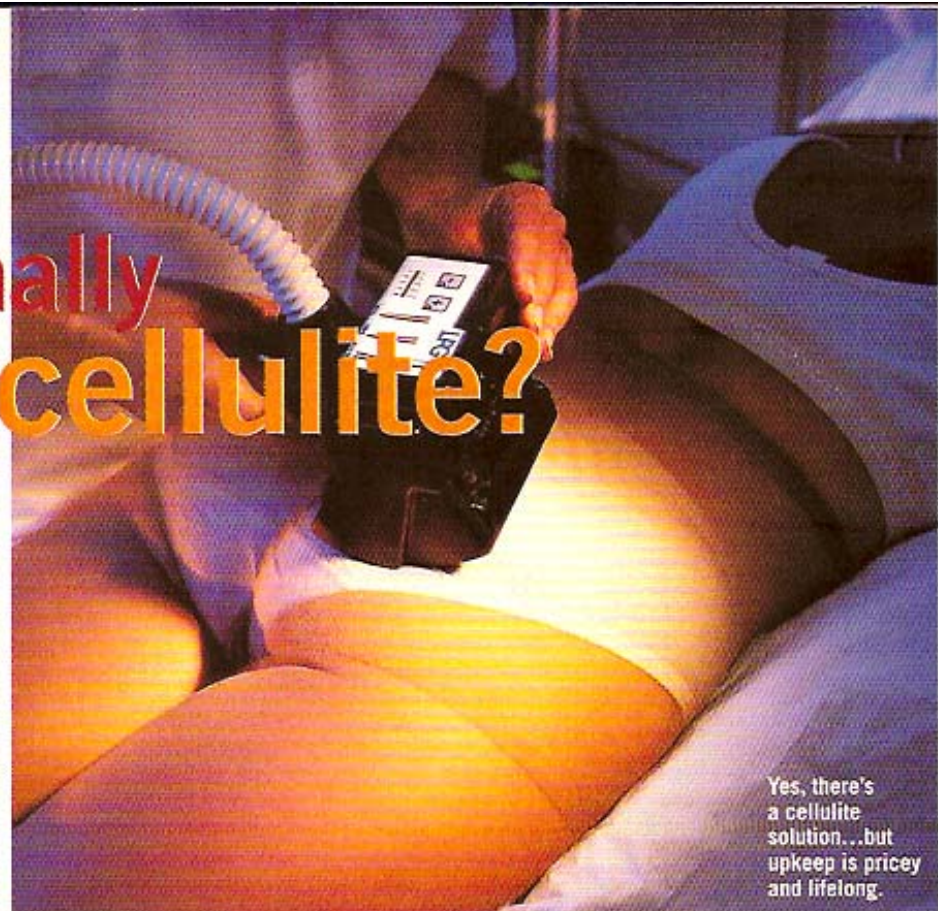
a cure for cellulite that doesn't involve surgery? Let me at it! I may be fit, but my recent thirty-second birthday brought me a few unwanted gifts: cellulite on the backs of my legs and an extra layer of insulation around my midsection and thighs.

According to the American Society for Dermatologic Surgery, cellulite plagues 85 to 90 percent of post-adolescent American women (men rarely get it). And it hits regardless of weight or physical fitness, usually appearing on legs, buttocks, hips and stomachs. Yet despite the estimated \$3 billion we spend each year on gadgets, supplements, skin creams and various other potions to wipe out cellulite, nothing known to woman really gets rid of it.

Until now.

smoothing the lumpy, bumpy fat away?

That's what companies marketing a non-invasive cellulite massage therapy want us to believe. With promises of temporarily eliminating the appearance of cellulite, these treatments—sold under such names as LPG Endermologie and SilkLight—are soaring in popularity. Europeans have used Endermologie since 1986. In 1996, the first



Yes, there's a cellulite solution...but upkeep is pricey and lifelong.

few machines trickled onto the U.S. market. Today, more than 1,000 cellulite massage machines can be found in doctors' offices and day spas nationwide, and over 6,000 worldwide. Last year alone, patients in the U.S. spent more than \$65 million on the procedure.

Doctors say cellulite occurs when fat and lymphatic fluids in the lower layers of the skin are forced up through the dermis, partly as a result of pressure from slim threads of vertical connective tissue. This is what creates those unlovely dimples.

So, can a massage, even a so-called "subdermal" massage, help reduce the appearance of cellulite? "When I examined before and after pictures provided by the companies selling the machines, I was skeptical," says Jeffrey Yager, M.D., a New York City-based plastic surgeon. Then he attended training seminars and saw results on real patients. He purchased an Endermologie machine and hasn't looked back: "My patients are thrilled," he says.

Lori Howard, 39, a civil servant in Los Angeles, is even more effusive. She says she had "incredible results" after beginning SilkLight treatments in April 1997. "I had a pouchy belly and cellulite on my behind, stomach and the backs of my thighs," says Howard, who signed up for 16 weekly 30-minute treatments from April through June 1997. For maintenance, she returned once or twice a month for

nine months. The cellulite didn't completely disappear, but, she says, "I was no longer jiggly, my skin became firmer and my belly pretty much flattened out." Her last treatment was over a year ago. "Now I look like I did before getting treatments," she says, "so I'm going to buy another 16-session package."

too good to be true? let me be the judge!

I was still dubious. To test-drive this cellulite sucker myself, I made an appointment with Dr. Yager. He told me that I was a good candidate (you shouldn't be more than 30 pounds over your ideal weight) and advised me to drink at least 10 glasses of water a day to flush my system of the "waste fluids" the massages would release. He also recommended that I eat a balanced low-fat diet and exercise moderately. If I did as I was told, he

product: Cellulite Massage Therapy
claim: Eliminates the appearance of cellulite

the deal: The treatments aren't cheap: roughly \$1,400 to \$1,600 for an initial series of 14 to 16 weekly treatments, then \$60 to \$80 per session for monthly, even twice-monthly, follow-up treatments. Forever.

where to get it: To find a doctor or spa near you, call Endermologie at 800-222-3911 or SilkLight at 888-330-5240.

promised that Endermologie would tighten my skin, make me feel invigorated and might even reduce my measurements. Yeah, right.

I slipped into the nylon bodysuit he gave me for the procedure and lay on a table, stomach down. Although the machine looked and sounded like a large upright Hoover vacuum cleaner, the massage itself wasn't unpleasant. It felt like a big toothless mouth sucking my skin and rolling it around between its gums. As a trained technician performed figure eights and circles with the nozzle, I turned onto each side so she could access my hips. I finished on my back as the front of my thighs and tummy were "swept."

After the almost 45-minute treatment, I felt invigorated and my skin was pinker—but I couldn't detect any other effects. Then, after the fourth or fifth visit (and not having eaten less or exercised more than I normally do), *whammo!* My clothes fit differently. My stomach and inner thighs seemed thinner. Tighter. I didn't lose any weight, but people asked me if I had because I was noticeably smaller around my midsection. After eight treatments, I lost about a quarter inch from each thigh, half an inch from my tummy.

the FDA okay

In 1996, massage machine manufacturers made overblown promises of "cellulite reduction," "deep tissue contouring" and "body sculpting." But the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) quickly took exception to such marketing hyperbole. In 1998, after an informal review of Endermologie's materials, the FDA permitted Endermologie, SilkLight and others to make the limited claim that the massager "temporarily reduces the appearance of cellulite." This was the first time the FDA had permitted manufacturers to make this claim; up until then, only cosmetics and dietary supplements that did not fall under the FDA's aegis had been doing it.

Since that time, scientists at universities around the country have been putting Endermologie to the test. For example, research conducted on Yucatan mini-pigs (the skin of pigs is similar to that of humans) at Vanderbilt University School of Medicine in Nashville found that while Endermologie does not remove fat, it does visibly smooth cellulite.

Many patients also lose inches. In a study of 85 women undergoing Endermologie published in the journal *Aesthetic Plastic Surgery* in March/April 1998, the treatments created "significant measurement loss...regardless of weight change." Lisa Perotta Hall, 25, of Miramar, Florida, has been getting Endermologie treatments for the last year and a half and says, "My saddlebags are gone, my legs look great and my skirts are no longer snug." In early May, LPG submitted more studies to the FDA showing that Endermologie actually reduces measurements. If the FDA approves, the company will be permitted to add that claim as well.

the bad news? it doesn't last

Unfortunately, the effects don't last long. It's been six weeks since I finished the treatments, and like Cinderella at midnight, I feel everything returning to its former state. Typically, patients purchase an initial series of 14 treatments, after which doctors recommend monthly to twice monthly follow-ups. I'm still weighing the slimming benefit of the massage against the slimming effect on my wallet.

For some people, though, discontinuing the treatments isn't an option. "You need maintenance; it's like getting your hair color touched up every month," says Joanne Scharr, 39, who started Endermologie treatments a year ago with a 14-week package and still goes once a month. "I'm vain, I live in Florida and I work in a plastic surgeon's office, where I'm exposed to beauty all day long," she adds. "I see women who never took care of themselves, who are now in their sixties, trying to repair the damage. I'm starting while I'm young." □

can you get rid of cellulite by popping a pill?

The idea's not so far-fetched, according to George Beraka, M.D., an attending plastic surgeon at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City, who's running the first U.S. clinical trial on Cellasene, the much-hyped anticellulite pill. Cellasene has been sold in Italy for five years. Since its arrival in the U.S. in March 1999, boxes have been flying off shelves.

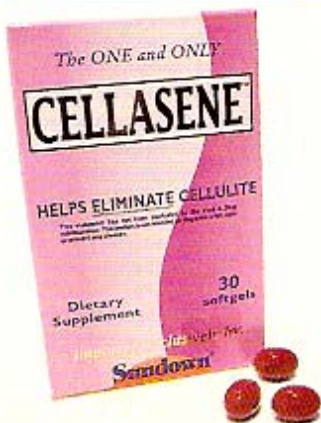
"I was very skeptical when I first heard about this," says Dr. Beraka. "Then I reviewed the clinical trials performed in Italy, and all three showed statistically significant reduction in women's thigh circumferences and a significant reduction of fat under their skin. So I agreed to conduct my own clinical trials, following 10 women for 12 weeks. It's been just four weeks, but already most of the women's thighs look smoother."

So what does this over-the-counter herbal supplement

actually do? "Cellasene seems to work by improving the micro-circulation right beneath the skin, making it easier for the body to use those fat stores," says Dr. Beraka. "The four active ingredients—gingko biloba, grapeseed extract, sweet clover extract and brown kelp extract—improve blood supply in general and have been used and studied in Europe for decades."

Still, many doctors remain unconvinced. "It's tempting to think that you could just take some pills and watch the cellulite melt away," says Paul L. Schnur, M.D., president of the American Society of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgeons and chief of plastic surgery at the Mayo Clinic in Scottsdale, Arizona. "I would have to see a carefully controlled research study and detailed histories of patients claiming to be helped before I would ever recommend it to a patient."

product: Cellasene
claim: Helps eliminate cellulite
dosage: Dr. Beraka recommends three capsules per day after meals for the first 8 to 12 weeks, four months off, then a second 8 to 12 weeks on the pills. For maintenance, continue the three-a-day, 8-week treatment twice a year.
cost: About \$25 to \$35 for 30 gelatin capsules.
where to get it: For information call 800-327-0908. Available nationwide.



PHOTOGRAPH BY ROBERT GLASGOW