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No Easy Solution For Stubborn Cellulite

9 Of 10 Women Have Dimpled Fat

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Nan Jaeger, a 39-year-old living in Los Angeles, is one of thousands of healthy-weight women who struggle with cellulite. She said she has less than 18 percent body fat but still has a dimpled or cottage-cheese look on various parts of her body.

She said it first popped up 20 years ago, and it makes her feel out of control.

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"It takes so much more effort to find clothes than can conceal it and look in fashion. I had to give up shorts until recently when longer shorts really took off," Jaeger said.

Cellulite comes from small pockets of fat that bulge against the skin, said Dr. Nissan Pilest, medical director at [Total Dermatology](#) in Irvine, Calif. He said the little pockets are attached at a deeper level with fibrous tissue, so the edges are pulled inward, giving the distinctive look.

Laser Treatments

After years of feeling helpless, Jaeger read an article about a remedy called VelaSmooth and decided to try it. The article said it is "a laser-like device that combines radio frequency and infrared light energies with tissue mobilization. These three treatment modalities work together to safely and effectively improve cellulite and recontour the skin surface."

Jaeger spent \$750 on treatments that didn't work.

"(It was) effective at reducing the size of my wallet but, sadly, I still have a large crop of indentations and bumps," she said.

Many Women Get Bumpy

"Most women end up with some level of cellulite, and even very young women in their teens can see cellulite on their thighs and buttocks," Pilest said.

Patients don't have to be overweight to have cellulite, said Dr. Charles Crutchfield III, medical director at [Crutchfield Dermatology](#) in suburban Minneapolis. He said cellulite occurs in about 92 percent of all women and in 8 percent of all men. He said even Olympic-caliber athletes have cellulite.

With nine of 10 women carrying a notoriously difficult-to-treat condition, a multibillion-dollar industry has been created with products promising to treat those pesky pockets of fat.

Crutchfield said he's suspicious of most of the treatments, especially of laser-like devices that work poor to fair, at best.

Elizabeth -- who asked not to use her real name -- is one dissatisfied customer. The 55-year-old spent about \$1,800 on procedures and creams that promised to reduce cellulite, but she's had little success.

"This is a general warning to be very, very careful when someone proposes those treatments. Make sure they have plenty of before-and-after pictures of patients that they have actually treated -- not photos from company info -- and that you can

talk to other patients who have had similar treatments," Crutchfield said.

Dr. Kevin Hayavi, medical director at [Beverly Hills Physicians](#) in southern California, said he has seen no effective ways to treat cellulite.

"Traditional procedures that reduce the body fat will not treat cellulite. These procedures include liposuction, creams and body wraps," Hayavi said. "The airways are bombarded by pseudo-scientific infomercials that make claims with no scientific evidence."

One Possible Hope

Elizabeth said the only cellulite treatment she would still consider trying is mesotherapy, also known as lipodissolve, which involves nonsurgical injections delivered into the middle layer of skin. The injections are designed to break down fat cells.

Crutchfield said mesotherapy is the one procedure that does work. He said that in his experience, mesotherapy works best for patients who are younger than 35, exercise regularly and eat a healthful diet. However, Crutchfield said satisfying results occur only about 50 to 60 percent of the time.

"Even in our best efforts, we fail 40 percent of the time," he said.

Kimberly Hulse, of Spring Hill, Kan., said she is one of the lucky women who had success with lipodissolve injections. Previously, the 39-year-old had tried creams that promised to reduce the appearance of cellulite, but didn't see any results. She decided to try the injections when an [Advanced Lipo Dissolve Center](#) opened in nearby Kansas City.

"I started to treat the area on the inside of my thighs and within two treatments noticed that (the cellulite) had diminished somewhat," Hulse said.

Pilest said the most successful cellulite treatments he has seen combine mesotherapy and VelaSmooth.

He said he's also excited about a new FDA-approved procedure called SmartLipo, which is based on a laser-induced breakdown of the fat cell wall and the liquefaction of the fat within that cell so it can be easily removed while the patient is under local anesthesia.

However, Pilest said his clinic is not yet offering SmartLipo because he wants to make sure it lives up to its promises.

Meanwhile, doctors said the simplest way to reduce cellulite is to exercise daily, eat healthfully, cut down on sodium and drink a lot of water.

"If you stay at your normal weight, your cellulite will be less of an issue," Pilest said.

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