

Fat-freezing is the space-age treatment turning mainstream

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Fat-freezing is designed to deal with the fat pouch many people carry on their waistline.

It's universally accepted that most women have a stubborn little pocket of fat that no diet or extreme exercise plan can blitz. Even Hollywood goddess Jennifer Lawrence moaned about her "armpit vagina", the little flabby fold between the underarm and bra.

And this nuisance sag can come in all shapes and sizes. Inner-thigh thickness, bingo wings or post-pregnancy muffin tops. Whatever its form, it's usually downright impossible to banish. Well, until now, cosmetic experts say.

Recent figures out of America reveal that fat freezing, a non-invasive alternative to liposuction, is now the third most popular non-surgical procedure, coming in behind dermal fillers and Botox. The procedure has seen a 24.7 percent rise in one year, partly because there are no needles, incision or downtime. You can freeze your fat in your lunch hour.

Cosmetic expert Dr Sarah Hart of Auckland's Skin Institute says that New Zealand is on the eve of experiencing a similar spike in popularity.

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Skin Institute's Queenstown branch welcomed a new fat-freezing machine in March, with the tech likely to be rolled out to a few of their 15 sister clinics in the next few months.

Already, Kiwi women are lining up to have their fat ice-blasted off, starting at \$600 an area.

"The technology is incredible. You chill the problem area down with a -8 temperature and the fat cells die and disappear," explains Dr Hart. "But it's the walk-in, walk-out nature of the treatment which is attractive to women.

"It can take as little as an hour and you can read a book or do some work on the laptop while the fat is being frozen away, and then head back to the office."

The magical machine in question is the Cooltech and it's set to revolutionise fat-freezing, enabling women to speedily contour their body shape but without the risks of going under the knife.

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So, here are the facts before taking an icy dive into non-invasive body sculpting...

What exactly is fat freezing?

Fat freezing was first discovered when doctors noticed that children who ate too many ice pops experienced fat degradation in their cheeks. The result? Scientists were able to discover that fat is more temperature-sensitive than your skin.

However, fat freezing, scientifically known as cryolipolysis, isn't an entirely new technology. It was first approved by the FDA in 2010 and a handful of cosmetic surgeries spotted across New Zealand have been offering their version for the past few years.

But driving the current wave is new improvements in technology, which means the treatment is now more effective and faster to do as the machine can attack larger areas of the body.

But how does it work?

Cooltech uses a number of different paddles to suck up the fat to freeze. "It looks a bit like the end of a vacuum cleaner tube," explains Dr Hart. "Initially, the area feels cold but then it goes numb and patients don't really feel anything."

After an hour, the paddle is removed and what's left is a very strange hard shape from where the fat has frozen. Dr Hart adds, "It's a bit like a block of butter that's been in the fridge. It needs to be massaged back to flat."

But don't expect to return to work with a washboard stomach as the results are sadly not instant. Once the fat has frozen, it takes around two months for the cells to die and be washed out of the system.

What are the results?

"We've been really impressed with the results out of Queenstown," explains Dr Hart. "Women are generally interested in getting rid of the problem areas - the saddle bags, the muffin top and double chin."

There's a 30 percent reduction to fat in the area and Dr Hart says that it lowers the fat content density of the patient - that means it's harder for them to put the weight back on in that area. It essentially changes the shape of the body.

Sadly, this isn't a weight loss tool, so isn't for extremely overweight women trying to lose lots of weight. Instead, it's more suited to those who are generally fit and are healthy, but have an area which is really hard to shift.

Dr Hart says that for many women, when they try to attack this area with exercise or dieting, they may become too slim. "This treatment is to really tackle a problem area, rather than the whole body," she explains.

Is it safe?

Many of the issues with earlier treatments is that some patients complained about contour irregularities. In other words, strange block-shaped areas where the fat had disappeared. But more refined tech with bigger paddles means that this is less of an issue.

But some patients do suffer from numbed nerve feelings, especially from treatments to the stomach and that can last for a few weeks to a few months. But generally, the risks of this non-invasive procedure are pretty low in comparison, to say, liposuction.

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