

Ripple Effect

Stop the dreaded spread of cellulite

BY JUDITH ZIMMER

NO ONE WANTS IT, yet no matter how svelte we are, how much we work out or watch our diet, we could still have it. Though exercising and eating well do help, many of us are plagued by that dimpled, bumpy fat on our thighs and buttocks known as cellulite.

Our bodies need fat (it's an energy source and an insulator, surrounding and protecting the organs, and it helps us absorb vitamins A, D, E, and K), but too much can be a problem. In women, excess fat is stored in the buttocks, hips and thighs, where most cellulite forms.

"No one definitively knows what causes cellulite," says Dr. Andrew Kornstein, a New York City plastic surgeon. "There are many theories and many causes, probably working in combination."

A high-fat diet and a sedentary lifestyle seem the obvious culprits. However, scientists say that cellulite has nothing to do with the metabolism of fat. After all, most very overweight men don't have cellulite, and some very skinny women do.

So why are women plagued by cellulite? "Women tend to accumulate fat in their waist, hips and thighs," says Dr. Katie Rodan, assistant professor of clinical dermatology at Stanford University in California. "That is genetic. In women, these areas of the body are resistant to starvation. The evolutionary reason is that it helps us nurse our children."

Surprisingly, new research indicates that cellulite may have more to do with the male hormone androgen than with the female hormones. "Cellulite is driven by being female, but there is no evidence that changes in hormones associated with pregnancy, breastfeeding, birth-control pills or menopause directly affect it," says Dr. David McDaniel, director of the Laser Center of Virginia in Virginia Beach. However, women with high levels of androgen often do not have cellulite, according to obesity researcher Dr. Michael Rosenbaum, associate professor of clinical pediatrics and clinical medicine at New York's Columbia Presbyterian Hospital. In studies conducted by Dr. F. Nurnberg in the late seventies, men who had some cellulite also had low levels of the male hormone. ▶

BEAUTY

Smooth Moves

Many women have had the best results when they combine cellulite-treatment techniques: endermologie after body-contouring liposuction, or massage in conjunction with regular use of a cellulite cream. "There is no one thing that will cure cellulite, but a combination of things can help—spa treatments, products, nutrition and exercise," says Anushka, owner of the Anushka Day Spa in New York City, renowned for its body contouring and cellulite treatments. Remember, the real key is diet and exercise. No anticellulite program will work unless you maintain a healthy lifestyle.

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Many believe that enlarged, bulging fat cells play a role, as does poor circulation of fluids in the area. Skin type is also suspect: Loose or thin skin may reveal cellulite more easily. In addition, poorly hydrated skin from low water intake can look doughy, exacerbating the appearance of cellulite.

Another culprit: the fibrous bands between the pockets of fat in cellulite areas. As the skin sags and bulges with excess fat, the inflexible bands pull on the skin and create dimples. "Women have underlying connective tissue in the thigh that predisposes them to show dimpling," says Rosenbaum. "The fat sits in pockets that look like a honeycomb." In men, the connective tissue

forms a criss-cross pattern and gives more support. "The connective tissues thicken with age," says Rodan, making cellulite more difficult to get rid of the older you get.

Cellulite removal has become a \$100 million business, with fads that come and go in the continued search for the perfect cure. We looked at the seven most-discussed ways to reduce cellulite, to find what works and what doesn't.

CELLASENE Can the remedy for cellulite finally be as easy as popping a pill? Women all over the world hope so.

When Cellasene, the first herbal dietary supplement for cellulite, became available in Australia this past winter, there was a buying frenzy and supplies ran out. One woman reportedly paid more than £1,000 (about \$1,600) for a package of the herbal supplement, which usually sells for £25 (about \$40). When Cellasene was introduced in the United States last March, it brought the topic of cellulite into the public eye with media-driven debates about whether an herbal supplement could work. Sundown Vitamins, the company that distributes Cellasene in the States, was so concerned about American women rushing the stores, it distributed "Don't Panic" buttons to reassure them that there was plenty to go around.

As Cellasene creators tell it, the supplement was developed by Gianfranco Merizzi, an Italian chemist and the founder of Medestea Internazionale in Milan. He was inspired to create the herbal supplement after he judged a Miss Italy contest in which the beautiful contestants complained about having cellulite. The pill—which contains borage seed oil, bladderwrack extract, fish oil, grape-seed extract, soya lecithin, sweet-clover extract and Gingko biloba—is designed to address the problem from within, increasing blood circulation and raising metabolism (the speed at which the body burns calories).

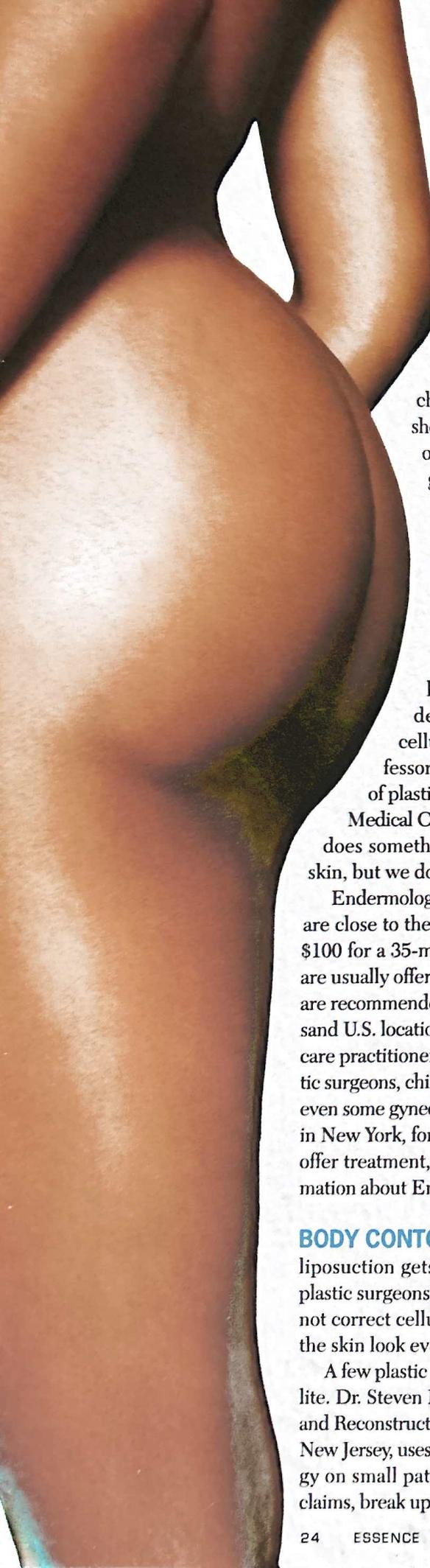
The jury is still out on the existence of scientific proof. "To my knowledge, there is no scientific evidence that suggests the ingredients in Cellasene have any effect on cellulite," says Rosenbaum, echoing the doubts of many American physicians.

Three Italian studies have been conducted, with promising results, and an American study is under way. New York City plastic surgeon Dr. George Beraka is studying the effects of Cellasene on ten of his female patients. He admits to being skeptical when he first heard about it, but says many of the ingredients have been studied and used for years in Europe. "The active ingredients in Cellasene work on the circulatory system," says Beraka, who says he believes Cellasene would be a good adjunct treatment to liposuction. "They are used in Europe for blood-vessel disease and may be valuable in heart disease. In this product, we look at circulation in the thighs."

So far Beraka's findings look promising. After the women had been on the supplement for four weeks, their thighs were slightly smaller, with less cellulite. No side effects were reported. Still, Beraka says that "it's too early to draw final conclusions." More extensive studies are expected to be completed by year's end. Nonetheless, women like Moria Pauley, 26, one of Beraka's patients in the study, are pleased with the new alternative. "It took four weeks, but my legs are smoother," she says. "And I'm not making a big commitment. It's so easy. I take a pill with every meal."

Is Cellasene the solution we've been waiting for? Only time will tell. In the meantime, hordes of hopeful women are buying the dream.

ENDERMOLOGIE This noninvasive treatment created quite a stir two years ago when the FDA said it temporarily reduces the appearance of cellulite. It involves a hand-held device with two rollers and suction that is maneuvered over the back, buttocks, legs and thighs, giving a form of deep-tissue massage. The squeezing [CONTINUED ON PAGE 24]



and kneading supposedly rearrange fat, smooth skin and shed inches. "To treat cellulite, you have to alter or break up the fibrous bands that pull on the skin," says Dr. Birgit Toome, a New Jersey dermatologist. Endermologie is suited to that.

We sent ESSENCE fashion editor Malissa Drayton Lisbon to Dr. Lionel Bissoon at the New York Sports and Spine Complex to check it out. "My cellulite is gone," she claims, six months after her series of Endermologie treatments. "And going through the treatment helped me mentally to begin to exercise, drink eight to ten glasses of water a day and give up fried foods. I've slowly lost about eight pounds."

Despite its fans, there's still no determination on how Endermologie works and how long results last. "There's no evidence that deep massage affects cellulite," says Dr. Bruce Shack, professor and chairman of the department of plastic surgery at Vanderbilt University Medical Center in Nashville. "Endermologie does something to smooth the surface of the skin, but we don't know what that is."

Endermologie, recommended for women who are close to their ideal weight, costs from \$70 to \$100 for a 35-minute session. Fourteen sessions are usually offered in a series; monthly follow-ups are recommended. It's performed in about a thousand U.S. locations by a variety of licensed health-care practitioners, including dermatologists, plastic surgeons, chiropractors, massage therapists and even some gynecologists. Licensing varies by state; in New York, for example, massage therapists can offer treatment, but not in California. (For information about Endermologie, call [800] 222-3911.)

BODY CONTOURING An invasive procedure, liposuction gets rid of unwanted fat. But many plastic surgeons say outright that liposuction cannot correct cellulite and in some cases can make the skin look even bumpier.

A few plastic surgeons, however, do treat cellulite. Dr. Steven Davis, of the Center for Cosmetic and Reconstructive Plastic Surgery in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, uses externally applied ultrasonic energy on small patches of it. The sound waves, he claims, break up fat and smooth the skin. No lipo-

suction is done, and the lymphatic system (a part of the immune system that rids the body of toxins and nourishes skin tissue) takes away the liquefied fat, he maintains. The procedure costs about \$250 per session; five to eight sessions usually required.

For patients with slightly more cellulite, Davis uses external ultrasonic-assisted liposculpting. In addition to administering sound waves, he takes out little pockets of fat and uses a forked cannula (a small tube specially designed to sever the attachment of skin to fat) on the connective bands. Another procedure, fat grafting or autologous fat injection, consists of injecting small amounts of fat from other areas of the body into depressions where a forked cannula has broken up connective tissue. Some patients receive as many as a hundred small fat grafts. But most plastic surgeons are skeptical. "Fat grafts are an effective treatment for one very bad cellulite dimple, but not for all of them," says Kornstein. Costs: fat grafts, \$1,800 to \$2,500; liposculpting, about \$2,000; liposuction, about \$2,300.

MASSAGE What kind of massage helps cellulite? It depends on whom you ask. Many claim the most effective massage for cellulite uses light pressure to help eliminate excess fluids and toxins; others say any kind of massage can improve circulation.

One of the best forms of light-pressure massage is manual lymph drainage (MLD), developed in Europe. A trained MLD therapist stimulates the circulation of lymph (clear tissue fluid) and the elimination of toxins in these fluids. "There is some suggestion that manual lymph drainage may help reduce postoperative swelling; but could it be effective for cellulite?" McDaniel asks. "That's an unanswered question." An hour-long session costs about \$80. To find an MLD massage therapist, call the Dr. Vodder School at (250) 598-9862.

Acupuncture is often used to prime the body for massage. At The Spa at Equinox in New York City, the Cellulite Reduction Treatment combines acupuncture and Chinese massage techniques. "I'd heard that once you get cellulite, you always have it," says Samantha Lawson, 40, an avid exerciser. "That scared me." Of the Equinox treatment, she says, "It smooths it out. I'm cellulite-free."

HOME METHODS Cosmetics companies promote creams as a relatively inexpensive way to tackle this condition. Do they help? "In general, they moisturize the skin, and that may help improve the appearance of cellulite," says McDaniel. But if you're already using moisturizer on your legs, he isn't [CONTINUED ON PAGE 26]

'Exercise is still the best natural defense against cellulite.'

sure such creams will do much more. There are no scientific studies of whether the creams actually penetrate the skin or the underlying fat layer.

Cellulite creams contain various ingredients designed to minimize at least the appearance of cellulite. Retinoids are said to firm skin and improve elasticity. Botanical extracts—butter's broom, green tea or lemon—are thought to enhance skin tone. Caffeine and its related compounds, theobromine and theophylline, are believed to stimulate the fat breakdown.

Sisley Special Body Contour Cream, with botanical ingredients (marine algae, essential oils like rosemary, lavender and extract of horsetail), is one of the more costly, at \$132 for 5.2 ounces. "Customers swear by it," says Janet Sanchez, counter manager for Sisley at Bergdorf Goodman in New York City.

Women have also proclaimed loyalty for Elizabeth Arden Ceramide Firm Lift Body Lotion (6.8 oz, \$35), which has retinyl linoleate and botanical extracts; Clarins Body Lift Minceur 2000 (7 oz, \$46), which combines caffeine, butter's broom and horse chestnut; and Lancôme Reflexe Minceur (6.8 oz, \$45), which contains caffeine and salicylic acid.

You can improve lymph flow and circulation on your own with gloves, mitts and brushes that

offer a do-it-yourself massage. One of the longest-selling sets is Elancyl, the French at-home cellulite kit. Elancyl Toni Compact is a body massager with rubber nodules that provide pressure and suction. It is used with body-toning soap that contains butter's broom and ivy. The glove is \$27.50; soap refills, \$9. For stubborn cases, there's Elancyl Extreme Minceur (0.35-oz vials, 14 for \$40) with caffeine extracts.

Skin brushes (\$8 to \$15) can be used to boost circulation and eliminate toxins as you brush upward from the ankles to the thighs and buttocks. "Look for natural-bristle brushes," says Annet King, worldwide training and development manager, International Dermal Institute in

Torrance, California. King recommends brushing with only moderate pressure.

DIET AND NUTRITION "If you eat properly and exercise, fat will come off," says Roniece Weaver, a registered dietitian at Hebni Nutritional Consultants, Inc., in Orlando, Florida, and author of the forthcoming *Slim Down Sister* (Dutton). "The cellulite? Some lose it and some don't."

An anticellulite diet is any good diet—low in fat, high in soluble fiber, with limited sweets. (The body easily breaks down fiber for energy, so there's less left over to store as fat.) "We only need 30 percent of calories from fat daily, but we eat much more than that," Weaver says.

EXERCISE "Exercise is still the best natural defense against cellulite," says Courtney Barrow, a personal trainer at New York's Equinox Fitness Clubs. Aerobic exercise—walking, running, swimming, cycling—burns calories and improves circulation. Strength training raises the metabolic rate, so you burn calories even after the workout ends. Remember, cellulite is stored energy like any other fat, so the more calories (energy) you burn, the better. As for spot reducing, exercises targeted to the buttocks or thighs will tone muscle, but won't eliminate fat from that particular area.

IN CONCLUSION... Cellulite is distinct to women and is an intrinsic part of our appearance. And that isn't necessarily bad. "This is the way God created people," says McDaniel. "It is our culture that defines cellulite as unattractive." Some of the world's most beautiful women have "the problem." "You won't catch me in a pair of white stretch pants because I have some cellulite, which I know isn't necessarily a horrible thing," admits Tyra Banks in her book *Tyra's Beauty Inside & Out* (HarperPerennial). "It's natural, and a lot of women have it."

However, most women who spend time and money on cellulite treatment of any kind say it's worth it. Think of it this way: If you were concerned about your appearance, how long would you go without having your hair done? Taking care of cellulite is "like taking care of your hair and your nails. It is a maintenance thing," says Rodan. "Experiment with cellulite treatments, but don't get your hopes up about any one thing. It's important to remember that all treatments are temporary." Then again, so are haircuts. ♦

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Cellulite Around the World

All cellulite may look alike, but women's attitudes about it vary greatly in different countries. In France, "fat is terrible, but cellulite is worse," says one Parisian woman. Latin American women are also highly concerned, perhaps more than their U.S. counterparts: Clarins reports that its cellulite creams sell about 20 percent more in South America than in the United States. However, in Nigeria women aren't troubled by cellulite. "People don't really talk about it much," says a young Nigerian woman. And according to Dr. Arnauld Maloubier for Yves St. Laurent Skincare, in Japan, where the diet is lower in fat, older Japanese women have much less cellulite than their granddaughters, who've been exposed to Western fast food.