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Along with exercise programs, a targeted injection therapy may fight fat.

Pinpoint fat relief?

Mesotherapy promises to target your fat spots with little hassle, little pain, and big results

BY KATY KELLY

What if you could get liposuction results without surgery? In a doctor's office, over several short visits, with only a smidgen of pain? What if, like singer Roberta Flack, you could say, "I lost 2 1/2 chins almost immediately"?

Flack is mad for mesotherapy, a French alternative treatment that's gaining popularity stateside. Patients receive 100 to 500 skin-deep injections directly into trouble spots like hips or thighs. The shots usually include tiny amounts of the emphysema drug aminophylline and the heart medication isoproterenol, said to melt fat, along with a homeopathic formula made of sweet clover. The liquefied fat then "time-releases into the body," where it is either used as energy or excreted, says physician Lionel Bissoon. He has used the technique to treat hundreds of people, including Flack, and has offices in New York, Beverly Hills, Calif., and West Palm Beach, Fla.

Doubts. Too good to be true? Maybe. Mesotherapy is used by more than 15,000 physicians in Europe and South America. In the United States, however, there are some doubting docs. The drugs "have some fat-melting capabilities," says Denise Bruner, chair of the

American Society of Bariatric Physicians. "But what is it doing to your lipid profile? Is it going to elevate your cholesterol or cause enhanced plaque formation in the arteries? I think it has potential, but I'd like to see long-term studies." But Michael Steelman, the society's past president, points out, "when people diet and exercise, they are releasing fat into their systems. [Mesotherapy] would not create a problem as long as the person is making lifestyle changes." Most mesotherapists require diet and exercise programs.

They'll also slim down your wallet. Mesotherapy runs about \$3,000 for 10 sessions and can go higher. Still, satisfied customers care little about the price or lack of research and say the real pluses are the minuses. "I'm down from a size 16 to a 10," says Flack. "I have lost 32 pounds." Losses come from the right places. "It's not about pounds," says Marion Shapiro, a doctor who runs a mesotherapy clinic in West Orange, N.J. "It's about inches." After 10 sessions with Shapiro, Lisa Horowitz, 40, took 8 inches off her hips and waist. Says Bissoon patient Linda Marshall, 62: "I'm in a size 6, but suddenly I had a fat back." After one treatment, she adds, "I could see and feel a difference. Every time I've gone there's less. Now, it's smooth and tight, the way it was when I was younger." ●

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