

Cellulite Solutions?

Nearly all women have some cellulite. It's no wonder then that anti-cellulite remedies are big business. Do any work?

Cellulite is the nonmedical term for pockets of fat separated by bands of connective tissue that protrude into the skin layer. There's nothing unique about this fat, except that it gives the overlying skin a waffled, dimpled appearance. Women are more prone to cellulite than men because they have thinner skin and a less-even fat distribution under the skin; they also tend to accumulate more fat on their thighs and buttocks, where cellulite typically occurs.

Anti-cellulite treatments often promise "sleeker" thighs in just a few weeks. What's lacking is credibility—the small studies cited are usually poorly designed, unpublished and/or done by researchers with financial ties to the manufacturers.

- **Anti-cellulite creams and gels** contain caffeine, retinol, amino acids, green tea, and other substances that supposedly increase fat burning, stimulate circulation and decrease water retention, among other effects. Some compounds may improve the appearance of cellulite slightly—for example, by making the area swell. But there is no evidence of significant or lasting benefits. The ingredients must be able to penetrate the skin and reach the targeted tissue in high enough concentrations to have any effect, yet it's not known if these products do that. There are also reports of allergic reactions from some ingredients. These products are probably safe, but likely a waste of money.

- **Dietary supplements** promoted for cellulite contain vitamins, minerals, herbs, fish oil, lecithin, vinegar and other ingredients. They claim to boost fat burning and circulation, reduce fluid accumulation and have other skin-smoothing effects. But there's no evidence that any pill can reduce cellulite—and supplements may contain ingredients of questionable safety. At best, some have a mild diuretic effect that may temporarily reduce cellulite appearance. Don't take them.

- **Endermologie** is a massage therapy, administered by a doctor or trained professional, that uses a high-powered handheld roller and suction device. It is FDA-approved for the temporary reduction in the appearance of cellulite. The key words are "temporary" and "appearance." The rollers can help redistribute the fat if used regularly but they do not get rid of cellulite. In a small study, Endermologie reduced the circumference of treated areas but was only mildly effective in improving cellulite appearance. It's costly and may be painful.

- **Laser/light treatments** include TriActive and VelaSmooth, which are cleared by the FDA for the temporary reduction in cellulite appearance. These treatments heat up and "release" the fat and tighten skin, and then use roller suction massage to smooth the areas. A paper in *Lasers in Surgery and Medicine* noted that these laser procedures "yield better and more prolonged clinical results than other therapies" for cellulite, though the benefits are still limited. And you'd have to be treated regularly to maintain any benefit, at a cost of several thousand dollars. Mild side effects may include redness and swelling. It's not recommended if you have certain circulatory or heart problems or are pregnant.

- **Mesotherapy** involves injecting a mixture of drugs, plant extracts, vitamins and other substances into the skin supposedly to increase blood and lymph flow in the tissues and break up fat cells. Studies in people are scarce, and mesotherapy has not been proven safe or effective. Though some doctors offer it, none of the drugs are FDA-approved for use against cellulite, and there are no standard formulas or

doses. It can cause extreme swelling, allergic reactions and skin lesions, and there are reports of serious infections. If done incorrectly it can cause scarring; long-term consequences are unknown. Steer clear of mesotherapy.

- **Seaweed wraps, massage therapy, aromatherapy and other anti-cellulite spa treatments.** None are proven to have more than temporary benefits, at most. Vigorous rubbing or compression may make the skin look better briefly.

Bottom line: Cellulite is normal and there is no permanent solution. The best advice is to lose weight if you are overweight (weight gain doesn't cause cellulite but makes it more obvious), get more exercise and learn to accept your body as it is.

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